

# EXPONENT II

*Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?*



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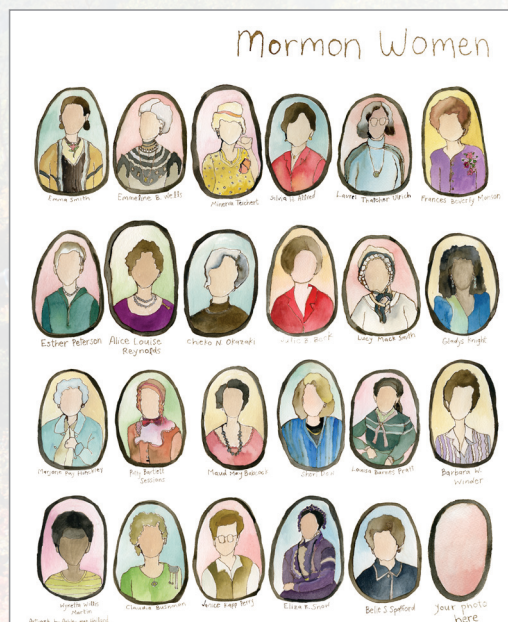
# WHAT'S INSIDE?

*featured stories*

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Mormon Women,  
by Ashley Mae  
Hoiland

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## WHAT IS EXPONENT II:

The purpose of Exponent II is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.



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## SUBMISSIONS TO EXPONENT II:

We welcome personal essays, articles, poetry, fiction, and book reviews for consideration. Please email submissions to [editor@exponentii.org](mailto:editor@exponentii.org) or mail them to Exponent II, 2035 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21217. Please include your name and contact information.

Submissions received by mail will not be returned.

We are always looking for artwork and photography to accompany our writing. Please send jpegs or gifs of art submissions to our email. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.



# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

*To our loyal readers:*

It's a happy time of growth for *Exponent II* right now, and to celebrate that, we've put together this summer issue, full of uplifting and lighthearted pieces. We have three personal essays dealing with marriage, including Lorraine Jackson's careful crafting of a civil Mormon wedding ceremony, Mary Clyde's ideas on relationships post-divorce, and Kelly Montgomery, an excommunicated lesbian, who decided with her partner to be active members of the Church. While it's been almost a year since she passed away, we wanted to take the time to celebrate and give Sister Chieko N. Okazaki, an influential Mormon pioneer, a proper farewell with Carol Lee Hawkin's funeral address and some of our readers' stories about how Chieko influenced them. We celebrate our foremothers in Brenda Thomas' sacrament talk about Relief Society and look for a better future for our daughters in this issue's Sisters Speak and Dana Haight Cattani's "To PEC or Not to PEC." We had fun putting together "Two Mormon Feminists Walked into a Bar," a humor feature, and we feel like we're on the cutting edge of pop culture with some Mormon-themed "Hey Girl" Ryan Gosling images, created by members of the rising generation of Mormon women: Ellen Lewis, Sagan Gotberg, and Whitney Paige, who all recently graduated from high school.

This issue begins Aimee's and my third year as co-editors of *Exponent II*. During the first year, we focused on laying a foundation, finding dedicated and talented editors and staff members, and adapting to the rigorous pace of hitting deadlines for a quarterly production schedule. This year has been more fun as we continue to grow at the organizational level, beyond the publication. We have a new president and treasurer who are getting our financial situation in order. We've also had a dedicated fundraising team plan and execute a successful fundraising drive. Finally, we've had a dedicated editor, Elizabeth Pinborough, who published *Exponent II*'s first book in over 30 years, which we completely sold out of within days of the first printing.

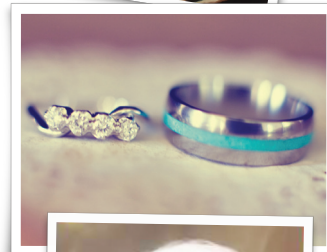
The second edition of *Habits of Being: Mormon Women's Material Culture* will be available on our website as a hard copy and as an e-book by the time you receive this issue. And, we're looking forward to reading the submissions for our upcoming political issue during this Mormon Moment in the United States' history.

Right now, Mormon feminism is producing plenty of powerful work through a variety of mediums. It's exciting to be on this journey, and we celebrate what an exciting time it is to be a Mormon feminist. Come continue the celebration with us this fall at our annual Exponent retreat with keynote speaker and Exponent founding editor, Claudia Bushman, and a line-up of workshops that has me positively giddy.

*Emily Clyde Curtis*



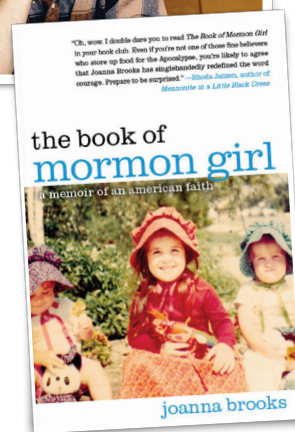
Emma Smith



Gladys Knight



Chieko N. Okazaki



Laurel Thatcher Ulrich



# The AIRPORT COUPLE Riddle

*" 'People should deserve how they are treated,' I thought, concluding that I must have done something terribly wrong not to be loved."*

By Mary Clyde • Phoenix, Arizona

For a time after my divorce, airports unnerved me. I was miserable in their long, anonymous corridors packed with ordinary couples. For me, each couple I passed posed an unsolvable, nagging riddle: How do couples remain *couples*? What fate or magic or knowledge or assets—what, *what* did the simple married folk do? Regardless of whether they seemed particularly happy or well suited, unmistakably, they were together, sitting knee-to-knee eating Wendy's hamburgers or standing side-by-side trying to decipher the departure schedule monitors. Their pairings seemed as unlikely and logic-defying as continental drift or as the magician sawing his assistant in half without dismembering her. But in the case of the couples, it was their staying together that baffled me. I recall a *New Yorker* cartoon of a magician's assistant's grave with two mounds, marked by separate headstones: *top* and *the rest*. That seemed an apt metaphor for me. Divorce was more than losing a husband; it was losing who I was.

Most confusing, even now, I'm not entirely certain how I became that stupidly stigmatized label: a divorcee. Many years ago, when my then-husband announced—with the sober calm of an auto mechanic diagnosing worn brake pads—that he wasn't sure he loved me, my first reaction was to try to explain to him that of course he loved me. I believe I said, "It's me. It's Mary." As if his loss of affection was a case of mistaken identity. Temple covenants, five children, and 26 years of marriage. Wasn't that love?

But the passing days and weeks revealed the truth of his confession. He didn't love me. In my fretful examination of our marriage, I experienced bouts of utter conviction of my innocence, alternating with suffocating certainties of my guilt in the failure of the marriage. Evidence of my minor but systematic wrongdoings presented itself like pesky computer graphics, relentlessly surfacing to disrupt my fragile peace. Vigilantly, I whacked the thoughts back, but increasingly they took a terrific toll. "People should deserve how they are treated," I thought, concluding that I must have done something terribly wrong not to be loved. I began to lose and gain weight like a divorced character in a short story I'd written and published years before. I pondered the story's eerie prescience. Had I understood something about divorce even then? It crossed my mind to worry that I'd been insensitive to my fictional divorcee's suffering. I wanted to apologize to her. But then, I longed to ask

the entire world for forgiveness. Surely, I had failed everyone.

As a subject, divorce seemed as routine and baffling as, say, radio frequencies, ice formation, and marriage itself. Indeed, what did love have to do with it—marriage or divorce?

I seemed to love and be loved by small children, big dogs, and gay men, but the man who'd promised to love me eternally did not. And what would the dissolution of our marriage do to my children? I loved them fiercely, but I couldn't love them enough to make their father care for me, and my love for him began to appear shabby and shop-worn, insufficient for the monumental task of keeping a marriage together.

I approached a beloved uncle for advice. My uncle radiates Jesus' love in his blue eyes. He kindly asked me thoughtful questions and spoke with gentle intensity, explaining what he'd learned from years of counseling people about marriage. Simply stated, he said that if both partners decide to work on the marriage, it will succeed. If neither will work on the marriage, it is doomed. If either wife or husband tries to save the marriage, it will succeed about half of the time. This sounded sensibly mathematical. I could work. I would try.

Then my uncle said something that I almost lost sight of in the difficult months that followed. He said, "Mary, if you try to save your marriage, you will be blessed."

I tried. My attempts may have been pathetic; obviously, they weren't successful, but they were sincere and continued for several months. Nevertheless, a few days after my husband, who was the second counselor in the bishopric, told me firmly that the marriage couldn't be salvaged, I walked into Sacrament Meeting shamefaced and aware that I was an unwilling participant in a small-scale scandal. I thought, *So this is how that feels*. I admired the courage of others who'd squinted in the glare of unwanted scrutiny. I tried to smile, and my tremulous smile



Photography By: Sweet Mugz Photography • Phoenix, Arizona

was returned by the ward members with genuine affection. No one—except me—looked away. Friends whispered that they loved me. I was hugged and passed from person to person like a bucket in a fire brigade. I experienced the equivalent of a standing ovation for what I saw as the ultimate failure of my life.

Understand this. If, as a culture, Latter-day Saints seem fixated on marriage, that doesn't have to stop us from rushing to bandage the wounded when the institution explodes in divorce. A good marriage may reveal the largess of an individual's love, but divorce can uncover a broad swath of communal caring. It wasn't just my dear friends; an army of angels ministered to my broken heart. In the months that it took to finalize the divorce, as I grew more disheartened, the ward was my Balm of Gilead. At a time when I'd whisper to my reflection, "I hate you," ward members supported me in a stirring manifestation of the baptismal covenant: They mourned with me; they comforted me. They reached out to my children. They carried us along: ball games, Eagle Scout Projects, and wedding receptions.

Alas, I never solved the airport couple riddle. I still only have a cursory understanding of how couples remain couples. I theorize that every woman everywhere commits offenses that a man could single out as a reason for divorce. Aren't we all at times petty? Self-righteous? Impatient? But every woman also has attributes that make her loveable. Every woman's worth is above rubies, though that may only be evident to a particular man; with luck, she marries him. Such a man makes a decision about her value, and she about his, which can cement the relationship for eternities. What I came to understand about the airport couples was simple, prosaic, but startling: They had decided to stay together. I must have witnessed the entire spectrum of marital bliss and misery in airports, but whatever the airport couples' situations—and whether or not they were good situations—they were couples. After they said *I do*, they did.

One evening after the divorce was finally over, I pushed my first grandson in a stroller in a pink- and orange-glazed Phoenix sunset. Fall is the desert's real "spring." Released from the stifling heat, desert dwellers tentatively emerge from the air conditioning and fling arms wide to the glory of moderate temperatures. That evening as we walked, fan palm fronds rustled, rabbits darted from beneath oleanders, and I realized, *This is my life*: the sweet baby, the beautiful weather, and a desert sunset. The idea amazed me. I hadn't expected to feel

such joy and peace. It was a different life than before, but it was mine. I hadn't had a job since I worked for Married Students' Housing in college, but a former mentor phoned to offer me a teaching position. I'd moved to a smaller house with a red tile roof, a looming eucalyptus tree, and a spotted, mongrel dog. I recognized that I was richly blessed, as my dear uncle had foretold.

I feel the truth of President Dieter F. Uchtdorf's comments: "Often the most difficult times of our lives are essential building blocks that form the foundation of our character and pave the way to future opportunity, understanding, and happiness." My divorce has allowed me fresh opportunities and clearer understandings. I know the sacred value of compassion and the healing powers of love—God's, others', and my own. I am happy.

*If, as a culture, Latter-day Saints seem fixated on marriage, that doesn't have to stop us from rushing to bandage the wounded when the institution explodes in divorce. A good marriage may reveal the largess of an individual's love, but divorce can uncover a broad swath of communal caring.*

Starting over has had some shocks of delight. A time or two, I've written my divorced name with the girlish flourishes I'd used to write my new married name when my face was unlined and my hair was a solid brown. I relish the instruction of etiquette books; I am *Mrs.*, but only to myself. I have been reborn, but into a new life. After time, *custody* is moot. My children love me. I'm entertained by their efforts to find dates for me, and touched, too. The question they always pose is whether the potential date (celebrities, public figures, and general authorities) is good enough for me. At home, I play Dionne Warwick loudly. Sometimes I let Sonny and Cher belt out "I Got You Babe." If my music choices don't represent good taste, I am satisfied that it is my taste. The dog sleeps on my bed,

occasionally whimpering from a bad dream that I wake him from by patting his soft furry side. I tell him that it will be all right; we both go back to sleep. And sometimes I entertain myself by tearing recklessly into product packaging. There is no one to be irritated by my inability to tidily open a Cheerios box.

Now my chief worry at airports is catching the plane. Airport couples pass without my scrutiny as I search for a purse-sized water bottle to purchase or puzzle over the departure screens. I'm pleased when a harried mother lets me help her with her over-tired toddler, and I'm anxious about the claustrophobia of dogs in travel carriers. However, now at the airport, I notice the legions of single people, many more than I'd have thought. May God bless them, I think. All of them and the couples, too. ❀

*For H. Burke Peterson*



My



# CIVIL MORMON WEDDING

*"I could not imagine this life in a giant religious family, always being the odd couple out."*

By Lorraine Jackson • Lehi, Utah

"So, what temple are you getting married in?" The question came with glee, during a big family function. Not an accusation, and certainly not an assumption that the answer would be anything other than "The Bountiful/Salt Lake/Timpanogos Temple."

Instead, the merriment fell into an awkward silence as my fears were realized: My fiancé's aunt didn't know that we weren't active Mormons. I looked to Dan, who mercifully glossed over the original question to move into more neutral wedding topics. The room shifted slightly, and my paranoia told me that my soon-to-be family was realigning their perspective on our marriage. I was consumed with fears about what misguided assumptions were being made about Dan, me, and our relationship.

We had met and nearly instantly fallen in love while I was on a vacation to Utah in the year prior. A wonderful Salt Lake job offer and a packed vehicle later, I was moving back to the "everlasting hills" of Zion where I had grown up and had ceremoniously decided to permanently leave behind after college. Fleeing to the East Coast had been an awakening for me about the status of my faith: I had spent many years in Utah trying to make Mormonism work for me, but the long circuitous conversations about the technicalities of green tea and the inequalities of the priesthood with the bishopric were slowly pushing me away from any affection for the Church. Away from the prying eyes of Mormon expectations, I felt like I was finally able to redefine my relationship with God. What remained was a desire to live an altruistic life, and a lingering fondness for my Mormon and Jewish ancestry, which I continued to explore and study even as my connection to the Church wavered. I found I could safely pursue the stories of my ancestors who had crossed the plains

to Utah or left Moldova in a Jewish diaspora without feeling constantly troubled by the dogma of the contemporary Church. My ancestors became my spiritual safe zone.

It was a shock to my system, then, to find myself not only back in Utah, but also about to join myself to a man who still loosely identified himself as Mormon, along with his giant, wonderful, and very Mormon family. The first time that Dan introduced me to his extended family was at a high school basketball game, where his cousins were playing in the state playoffs. There, I

met what seemed like billions more cousins, four sets of aunts and uncles, and one set of grandparents. Despite their fellowship, their kindness, the twinkle in their eyes to see Dan so happy with a woman, all I saw was MORMON.

For all my hopes to be seen for who I was, I could not seem to offer the same in return. I had intentionally left Utah behind so that I could pursue my spirituality without judgment. When I saw this enormous, loving family, I only saw a lifetime of disappointing them, of questioning their motives, and wondering when they would learn that both Dan and I were making conscious choices to live our life on the Mormon fringes.

I cried to Dan on the drive home from the basketball game, confessing that I could not imagine this life in a giant religious family, always being the odd couple out, and concerned that our combined distance from

the Church could jeopardize Dan's closeness to his family, which would have broken both our hearts. He assured me that his family would never let that happen. His unwavering belief in his family and in us was the first step towards me making peace with my faith and theirs.

*"My civil Mormon wedding was probably the best thing to happen to my spirituality in years.*

*It didn't just allay my fears about Dan's family, it required me to open my heart again and slay my own prejudices. Crafting a celebration together as a family was the ultimate reconciliation—not just of my future life within Mormon culture, but of the Mormon woman that I would always be."*

Dan didn't give up on me, and proposed atop the gorgeous red cliffs of Kanab, Utah, overlooking the cattle ranch that his Mormon ancestors had established when Brother Brigham sent them there to settle the wilderness some 150 years ago. We sat side-by-side in the early morning light as he pulled out a ring that, unbeknownst to me, had been given to him by my grandmother and belonged to my Great Aunt Ruth, the daughter of a Mormon pioneer herself. At that moment our ancestral worlds were entwined, and this incredibly romantic gesture reminded me that I had something pure and sacred to cling to in my otherwise wavering testimony. Our ancestors were ours, and they would be proud of our match. How could they not be? We spent the remainder of our engagement day visiting their cabins and cleaning off their headstones, which we both thought was the greatest thing in the world.

So, I set to planning our big, fat Mormon civil wedding. We knew right away that we wanted to give ourselves, our friends, and our family a personal and meaningful experience. And despite our shared confusion about our place in the Church, we had always shared an extraordinary soft spot for our ancestors. It was the sentiment of our engagement that inspired us to have a wedding not only to honor our love, but to honor both our families and, specifically, our Mormon pioneer heritage. Because Dan and I had direct relatives who entered the Salt Lake Valley through Emigration Canyon, it seemed all too perfect to marry in the little white church at This Is The Place Heritage Park.

To my relief, the awkward question of the temple was asked just once, and the only other religious tension we experienced in the process was choosing someone to marry us. Dan had to politely turn down the presented idea of a bishop, and in a wonderful turn of fate, I met a man at This is The Place who goes affectionately by "Diamond Jim," a Mormon with an Internet-ordained ministry license who often officiates weddings for couples at the park. He says he has performed ceremonies as a Sheriff, in pioneer coat tails and top hat, and even as a ranking member in the Star Wars Rebel Alliance. We opted for the top hat. While it seemed slightly absurd initially, he showed amazing reverence for our history and our story, and the top hat was a hit.

When we did finally share the location of our ceremony and our minister with the family, I was happily surprised by the excitement and warmth that Dan's family showed for our ideas. My paranoia about being spiritually saved was quickly replaced with gratitude as our families came forward in innumerable ways to make the wedding a treasured, meaningful day full of heartfelt elements. As Dan, our sisters, mothers, and I spent the summer making programs that doubled as fans, hand-stamping bags filled with desert wildflower seeds, and staining

doilies with coffee grounds, I often had a feeling of peace, belonging, and occasionally, a presence in my heart which I can only describe as timeless femininity. It was as if I could feel the calluses of weathered women, generations gone, in the tips of my fingers as we worked. I was tied to a centuries-repeated act of women sitting together, creating, and sharing.

In one of the great disasters-turned-miracles, my eldest sister fashioned a veil with hand-knit flowers and my Great Aunt Ruth's brooch just days before the wedding when my original veil plans fell through. One of Dan's aunts, a scrapbooking queen, presented us with an entirely handmade box to save keepsakes in when the wedding was over. It now holds my veil, our ring boxes, lace from my dress, and a copy of our vows.

During this bonding and crafting time, I asked my sisters and soon-to-be sisters if they would sing an a cappella version of "For the Beauty of the Earth" at the wedding. It was sung at my and my sister's baptism, and my grandmother has made it quite clear it will be sung at her funeral. Hearing all four of my sisters sing it together in perfect harmony during our ceremony was one of the most beautiful moments of my life.

My civil Mormon wedding was probably the best thing to happen to my spirituality in years. It didn't just allay my fears about Dan's family, it required me to open my heart again and slay my own prejudices. Crafting a celebration together as a family was the ultimate reconciliation—not just of my future life within Mormon culture, but of the Mormon woman that I would always be.

When Dan proposed, I had a clear, profound sense of all that had been done by the people before us whose Mormon, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant lives collectively guided us to this moment and all the moments after. The wedding didn't seal things up with a pretty bow, but it gave us a way to start our life authentically, and unafraid, joined together on the edge of Zion.



*Morgan Trinker Photography, from Birmingham Alabama*





# SISTERS SPEAK:

## RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION OF *Mormon Women*

An EXPONENT II reader writes, *"I am a 30-something new mom. Over the years, I have made peace with my identity as a Mormon. I like getting involved, helping the sisters in my ward, teaching quietly feminist gospel doctrine lessons. Despite the rough road it's been, I like being a bridge-builder. I'm stubborn and don't want cultural elements to drive me away from my birthright.*

*But my daughter is a really incredible kid. She's got this spunky energy. And if I dare stop to think about the subtle messages she'll get about her 'role' as a woman from nursery onward . . . gulp! And then there are the OVERT messages.*

*From moms of daughters: I'd love to hear how/if having a daughter changed your relationship with the Church. From anyone else, I'd love your thoughts about raising the next generation of girls in the Church. How can we help protect them from those problematic messages about womanhood, while at the same time teaching them to appreciate the best of Mormonism?"*

### CHRISTA BAXTER-DRAKE | OREM, UTAH

I just can't say this enough: The gender roles your children see at home totally trump what they hear at Church. Just this week I was reviewing that troubling Young Women lesson about respecting patriarchal authority. I'm pretty certain I was taught this, probably multiple times, and yet I grew up fully believing husband and wife make decisions together, listen to each other, come to unanimous conclusions, and move forward. Why? Because, as far as I could tell, that's how my parents worked. This is why as a college sophomore I didn't get why my literary theory teachers trod so carefully around feminism. Why would they think feminism would work against the Church when so much of what I had learned there taught me I was powerful, valued, strong, capable of receiving revelation and just as valuable as men? Modesty was about respecting my body, education was important, marriage was my goal, but I knew if it didn't work out I still was of worth. Seriously, this is all because my parents are wonderful, considerate, egalitarian people.

The examples of womanhood, manhood, and teamwork that your daughters see at home will be their default, their template for the future. And for everything else, conversations in the car with my mom were really what helped me figure out life. Be there, talk things through, and it will work out.

### MEGHAN RAYNES | DENVER, COLORADO

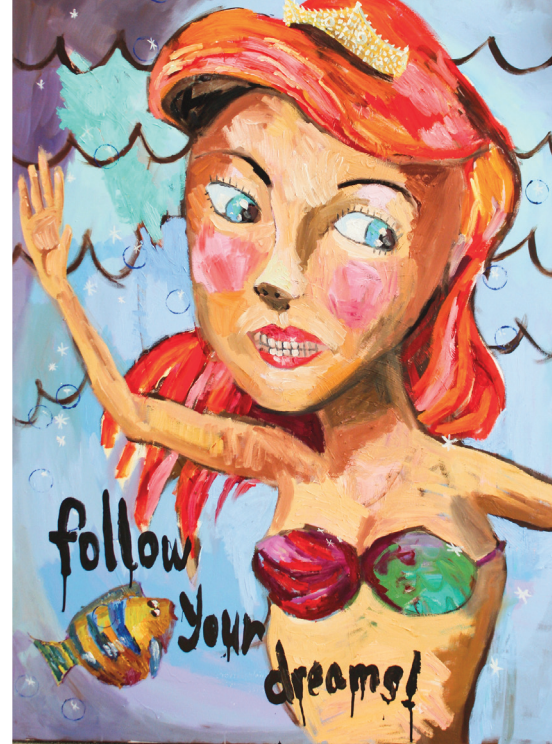
"I was fairly peaceful about my Mormon identity before having my daughter, but now I feel absolutely no guilt in rejecting problematic theology, policies, and cultural practices. Gone are the days of mental gymnastics and trying to make it all work; I don't even try anymore. I focus on all of the best parts of our

religion and ignore the rest. And I will not be shy in telling my daughter and my boys why I reject the rest when the time comes that this is actually an issue.

The Sunday she came home with a handout that said "I have a body like Heavenly Father" with a picture of a little boy underneath, I felt my heart break in two. I cried for hours. I couldn't believe that somebody had given that handout to my beautiful little girl without thinking how it made her body completely invisible. This is what I struggle with the most right now, the almost complete invisibility of women in our religion. I can deal with the cultural sexism because she will have to put up with that in our broader society. But to have women almost completely invisible—to not be able to recognize herself in scripture, hymn, liturgy and, most importantly, God—that is so painful. I find myself fighting back rage, sadness and tears at least once a week. I want to shake every leader, speaker, and teacher and say, "Look at my girl. She deserves so much more than what you are offering her." I cannot allow my daughter to believe that she is "less than" (missing word?) because she can't see herself."

### APRIL YOUNG BENNETT | SOUTH JORDAN, UTAH

Recently my husband said, "We need to put our daughter in Girl Scouts." It bothers both of us that boys in our ward are sent on repeated camping trips and other expensive activities. Such activities for girls, on the other hand, are few and far between because the Church sponsors Boy Scouts but not Girl Scouts. There is little we can do to change these inequities Church-wide (although I am willing to try), but we can compensate in our own family. The Church is going to provide our sons with Boy Scout troops but will not do so for our daughter? Then we'll do it. This strategy won't work for everything—there is nothing I can



Princess Paintings by Emily Fox King, Ogden, Utah

do to get my daughter a seat at the Sacrament table—but at least with some of these inequities, I can fill in the blanks.

#### ANONYMOUS READER | PROVO, UTAH

I have five daughters and have served as a Young Women president both at the stake and ward level. I love the gospel and think the Church has provided marvelous resources to assist in teaching pure doctrine and raising strong, intelligent, well-rounded children. However, I have been in meetings with my daughters where I have literally thought, “Everyone here sounds the same, looks the same, cries at the same moment, and wants exactly the same things from life.” I have wondered whether my daughters are destined to emerge from the process of growing up looking like a rubber stamp of everything they have seen around them. I wonder if they will have the choice to become the women God wants them to be and is quietly leading them towards, or if they will feel like they have to fit into the mold of what our culture is screaming they ought to be.

To me, part of the key is that we talk about it. I always ask them what they thought about certain meetings or talks. We try to learn together how to discern culture from doctrine and emotion from spirit. I try to encourage them to develop their own personalities, to recognize their individual strengths, to help each other through areas of weakness, and to understand that we are valued because we are different, not based on how well we can fit into this strange idea of what a Mormon woman “ought” to be.

I try to instill in my daughters that they are the children of God—a loving Mother and a loving Father eternally united and working for their good. I teach my girls that our Heavenly Parents are the singular source from which they can receive inspiration and direction about who they are and what their mission in this life is. Then, we start talking about how that revelation will likely be bounded by revealed truths in scriptures and from prophets. I hope that they will emerge from adolescence understanding that there is no single recipe that results in a “perfect Mormon woman.”

#### LINDSEY HICKS | ITHACA, NEW YORK

A large part of what we feminists take issue with in the Church is not doctrine as much as culture. I think there are enough of us to change the culture. We need to carry ourselves with confidence and pipe up. If we share our insights and opinions freely, we will create a new norm. We should enthusiastically accept callings to serve the youth and show them as well as tell them that we are equals.

#### MARISSA MARQUARDSON | TUCSON, ARIZONA

I have two little girls, and this has really helped awaken my inner feminist! I am more aware than ever about what is being taught at Church, and I am careful to take the time to talk about things with my eldest about the messages she receives from primary. For example, she asked how the world was created, so we sat down with some pictures and the Bible. I told her the story of the creation—except I also taught her that her Heavenly Mother was there helping to create our world (because I just can’t believe She wasn’t involved!). I want her to know that it’s okay to think about and have a relationship with her Heavenly Mother. She’s just not going to get that at Church.

### NEXT SISTERS SPEAK: MITT AND MORMONS IN THE LIMELIGHT

Since Mitt Romney became the presumptive Republican Presidential nominee, Mormons in their many varieties have received unprecedented attention from the media. A recurring question Exponent II has received from numerous media outlets concerns how Mormon feminists feel about Romney as a representative of their religion. Now is the time to make your voice heard!

*How do you feel about Romney’s nomination and the fact that he and his family will become the most recognized representatives of Mormonism in the United States? How do or don’t his policy positions represent core Mormon values you cherish?*

**Please send your responses to [sisterspeak@exponentii.org](mailto:sisterspeak@exponentii.org) by August 1st, 2012.**



# Remembering Sister CHIEKO OKAZAKI

Compiled by Exponent II Staff



On August 1st, 2011, our beloved sister, Chieko Okazaki, passed away. With her passing, the LDS community lost one of its most charismatic and engaging authors, speakers, and activists. Her experience living in a society in which she was often marginalized—whether for her race, her religion, or her sex—offered her a perspective that made her especially sensitive to those who felt like they did not “fit in” with LDS Church culture and helped her lead as the first counselor and the first woman of color in the General Relief Society presidency in the 1990’s.

We are glad to pay a small tribute to her legacy here by sharing stories from those whose lives have been impacted by her profound words of wisdom and inspiring spirit.

The conversation began with chore charts, but it ended with *kigatsuku*. My daughters are aged seven and five, and with enough reminders they’ll do their chores as assigned, but we ran into problems when I asked them to put away their folded laundry.

“But Mom, that’s not on the chart.” Beth clings to rules.

Instead of launching into the all-too-familiar litany of “What does Daddy do to make our house work? What does Mommy do to make our house work?” I landed on *kigatsuku*. I’m sure I explained it terribly. Chieko Okazaki—oh, she was an amazing teacher!—would have done better. But they got the gist of it, at least: You look for things that need to be done, and you do them whether they’re your job or not.

My mother is a schoolteacher, so Chieko’s talks always felt familiar to me. When she greeted her audience with “Aloha!” or brought visual aids to the Tabernacle pulpit, I knew she was using classroom tools: Get everyone’s attention before you teach. Show, don’t tell, and have your students participate as much as possible. How many of us sitting in stake centers watching by satellite called out an “Aloha!” in response, or made a cat’s cradle in our laps with imaginary yarn?

I actually met Chieko, face-to-face, when she spoke at a Midwest Pilgrims retreat in 2008. She was tiny, and real, and kind. She said she didn’t understand the temple ceremony either. She talked about letting our physical and spiritual beings merge together, taking Jesus into the messiest and nastiest parts of our lives—the dirty kitchen, the tedious carpool, the fight with your husband. After all, what could shock him? When one of my friends said, “We’ve all had the experience of sitting

in a Church setting and knowing there’s a comment out there you could make, and you might or might not make it, but you know that if you don’t say it no one will say anything like it.” Chieko urged us to *say it*. Stand up. Say what needs to be said.

I think of those words often. Be that person. Say the words. When you see a need, fill it without waiting to be asked.

Noticing, developing awareness, realizing—these are the qualities that turn children into adults, transforming them from beings who follow directions (or not) to beings who act of themselves. I want my children to be fully themselves, and if possible, I’d like them to learn who they are while they are still very young. So we practice. I send them into the donut shop with a few dollars, and ask them to choose for themselves. I ask them for directions when we’re on the subway. Which stop is ours? How do we get home? I want them to look adults in the eye and ask questions, save their money for something big that’s important to them, find something they’re passionate about and spend ridiculous amounts of time doing it. I want them to reach for God, and I want them to be the way God reaches to others.

Beth slips her hand into mine as we walk from the playground to the car. “I’m Leilani’s only friend,” she confides. “Everyone else won’t play with her, but I will. She needs a friend.” Sarah takes it upon herself to entertain her baby brother and keep him away from the stairs. Upon realizing that only boys pass the sacrament, she declares loudly, “But that’s not *fair!*” and darts off on the path of 5-year-old scheming. Bit by bit, the *kigatsuku* seed bears fruit.

**-LIBBY POTTER BOSS | BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS**

My father and Eddie Okazaki, Chieko's husband, grew up together on the island of Maui, Hawaii. I felt that always gave me an edge whenever I invited Chieko to speak at gatherings. Thankfully, she was always generous with her time and talents.

I had no reason to take pride in her accomplishments other than that I am also of Japanese descent and from Hawaii. Every one of her autographed, published books sits on my shelf. Whenever she spoke in general broadcasts, I paid particular attention, turning up the volume and basking in her practical words of wisdom. I and many others cherished her frank, open discussions of gospel topics. Her passing leaves a big hole in our hearts.

Chieko had a tremendous impact on the Japanese-American and Asian communities. Prior to her call to the General Relief Society Presidency, few Asian names appeared on the leadership rosters of wards in the United States. Perhaps bishops felt that blonde bouffant hairdos and blue eyes were part of the qualifications for ward leadership. But after Chieko was called and established herself as a force to be reckoned with, women with Japanese surnames began to appear as Relief Society presidents in areas where Asians were not the majority.

Americans can often stereotype Asian women as only being quiet, unassuming, and non-assertive. But these traits do not lay bare the talent, hard work, and dedication underneath the black hair, almond eyes, and petite stature of many of our Asian sisters. Chieko helped members see past the stereotypes and many were blessed as a result.

Chieko's legacy is still felt today even across the veil!

-ELLEN HORIUCHI WILLIAMS |  
GEORGETOWN, TEXAS

Some years ago, Chieko Okazaki attended the Rocky Mountain Retreat as our keynote speaker. When women got wind of this, it turned out to be the best attended retreat we'd ever had! Her reputation through her talks and books made the women of the Church want to be near her to listen, learn, and feel of her spirit.

We were all sharing a couple of big, rustic cabins high in the Colorado mountains, and Chieko immediately settled right in as one of us. She wore the customary blue jeans and T-shirt (managing, nevertheless, to look her usual chic self), enjoyed our Friday night potluck dinner with gusto, and made fast friends with each of us. Chieko's particular, special gift was making a connection with others; she focused, however briefly, on the individual, making each one feel important and respected. It wasn't charm or a method—she was simply being

herself. She was genuinely and passionately interested in other people's feelings and lives.

At the retreat I had been asked to talk a little about the women I had been working with while living in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world. In addition to discussing the challenges they faced, I showed examples of the exquisite, free-form embroidery produced by the women of the villages. No one was more interested than Chieko. She was focused on every word and asked incisive, penetrating questions. Afterwards she examined each piece of embroidered art with deep appreciation and pleasure. A few years later, a friend in California heard her speak at an event and told me that Chieko had mentioned the women of Bangladesh and their remarkable, imaginative, embroidered art done in the midst of terrible poverty.

Those of us at the retreat warmed ourselves at the flame of Chieko's faith. She loved her Savior and bore unforgettable testimony of Him. She loved us and we knew that she did, and she became part of our hearts. When I heard that she had passed away, I felt grief for the loss of a dear friend—though I had met her just once and briefly. That was the special gift of Chieko Okazaki.

-LAUREL MADSEN | FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

Chieko Okazaki made a significant difference in my life with her caring, inclusive messages. Years ago, I was reading *Cat's Cradle* on an airplane to Salt Lake. I was suffering badly with depression at the time and her words were a balm to my soul. I felt overwhelming comfort, knowing that I was part of

a sisterhood that transcended race, age, theology, status, health, wealth, physical appearance, or mental state. They were all part of her personal journey as well as mine. Tears were running down my cheeks. The lady next to me on the plane asked me what I was reading. I showed her the cover, and she asked me if it was good. I sobbed that it was an incredible book and that she should make sure she found a copy and read it. I didn't stop to wonder whether she was a Mormon, because it wasn't relevant. Listening to Chieko speak made me proud to be a Mormon woman. I just wanted to stand up and proclaim, "She's one of us!" Her personal trials, her insights about the scriptures, her imagery, and her use of visual

symbols took her message beyond language to women around the globe.

I didn't know her personally, but I knew she was my friend because she mirrored what mattered in my life. The amazing thing is how she mirrored so many disparate sisters. I believe that the Savior does it on a cosmic scale with each of us. He loves us for who we are and helps us want to be better. Chieko

*"Those of us at the retreat warmed ourselves at the flame of Chieko's faith. She loved her Savior and bore unforgettable testimony of Him. She loved us and we knew that she did, and she became part of our hearts."*



made us all want to be better.

-ALICE HEMMING | KENSINGTON, MARYLAND

I remember my husband telling me often about his wonderful 2nd grade teacher, Mrs. Okazaki. She and her husband had just moved to Salt Lake City from Hawaii, and it was her first year of teaching. My husband said a favorite memory was the first day it snowed. Mrs. Okazaki had never seen snow before and was so delighted that she stopped what they were doing and rushed the children outside to feel and share the frosty falling snowflakes on their cheeks and hands. She brought that same joy into her teaching every day. I'm not surprised she went on to be a principal.

I saw her many times over the years and attended every talk she would give at BYU Women's Conferences. I read every book and article she wrote. I soared with her words. I loved being a mother of six children and used the skills I learned from my elementary education degree to enjoy my mothering. Though raised with the Mormon teaching that a woman's place was in the home, I sometimes bristled at these rigid roles. It was thrilling to watch Chieko raise her sons while also working full-time. She proved that there are many ways to be a good, loving mother and wife.

In the 1990's I attended a women's retreat in Provo Canyon. Many of us had come with a sense of dissatisfaction and unanswered questions about prescribed women's roles. Chieko

must allow and reverence our individual stewardships to be different and accomplished in our own unique way. Let's quit sending the message there is only one way. Weave us together into a tapestry of unity, love, and acceptance." *Wow.*

There were a few women attending the retreat that were lesbians and other women who had a gay or lesbian child. They asked Chieko for her thoughts. I loved her answer: "How would Jesus treat these people? He loves them. Sometimes we struggle with the brethren and the dictates they give us but we as individuals should follow Christ's example to listen to our loved ones, passionately love them, and accept them as they work through with Christ."

Thank you, Chieko, for mentoring me through your words and example. Everytime I feel a frosty snowflake on my cheek I think of your joy.

-ANONYMOUS

A friend of mine lent me the book *Lighten Up!* by Chieko Okazaki a few years ago when I was going through an emotionally tough time. I opened the first page of Chapter One and read a few pages without blinking my eyes, as if I received a letter from a best friend. By the time I finished the book, Chieko Okazaki indeed became one of my best friends. I wanted to listen to her words of comfort, guidance, and wisdom and felt she would listen to me with complete understanding and compassion. I feel so related to her personally. Like her, I



was in attendance and started off her talk by handing out balls of different colors of yarn. Each woman was asked to share something about herself and then weave her yarn around the next person's yarn and so on. This continued until the yarn wove a colorful tapestry throughout the room. Her message: "There are so many ways to be accepted by our Heavenly Father. We

grew up a child of humble Japanese laborers, my parents were Buddhists, I joined the church at the age of 15, I could only have two children, I am a cancer survivor and often the only Oriental woman in my ward. I knew that the book would help me, and it did, it does, and it will throughout my life's stages.

Chieko Okazaki was a great optimist who I need and want to become more like. She was confident because she knew who she was and what she stood for. I want to be more purposeful like her. She was strong spiritually and emotionally because she was also able to learn as she went through the sometimes cruel experiences of life. She was so understanding of the diversity of women and could meet and see women without judgment. She was full of a sense of humor. She was full of love that is like Christ. I never met her but this is my interpretation of her from reading her books and her talks.

I hope many women will get to know Chieko's perspective, her life, her faith, her hope, and her wisdom. I hope many women will find a way out of their struggles like I was able to, and gain strength to move forward and become a genuinely happy being.

**-MASAKO BARROWES | LYME, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

When I hear a favorite song from the mid- to late '80s, I am transported back to my high school days and a more carefree time when the whole world was in front of me. I was full of hope and promise and ready to take on the world. This may sound strange, but the same feeling comes over me when I think of the General Relief Society Presidency from 1990-1997. Elaine Jack, Chieko Okazaki, and Aileen Clyde were the women who defined what Relief Society was when I left Young Women behind. Those seven years were vital in shaping how I looked at being a Latter-day Saint woman and how I would find my own individual path in the Church.

bottles to show us that even though the doctrines of the gospel are essential, the packaging is optional, and the two different quilts, showing us that there is no one, right way to be a faithful, Mormon woman.

Her words gave me strength as I tried to find my way as an adult. She taught me that it was okay to ask questions and that I could search and find answers. She taught me that I should regularly evaluate my situation and do what works best for my family. She taught me that Christ loves me and does not want me to be weighed down by feelings of inadequacy—she encouraged me to let Him in and “lighten up.”

I miss her. I am glad I have her writings to turn to when I need guidance, solace, and hope. As I read, I feel as if she were a close friend, someone who knows me and has faith in me.

I am grateful that she was there during my formative Relief Society years. Though I know there will never be another woman quite like her, I pray that someone with her spirit and optimism will come along to guide us and help my daughter's generation embrace life.

**-KIRSTEN CAMPBELL | GRANGER, ILLINOIS**



**ARTWORK:** *Hand Sewn Kimonos* | By Ellen Williams • Georgetown, Texas

Of the three, Chieko Okazaki seemed to speak the language my soul understood the best. Her smile and steady voice were what I looked forward to each time, General Conference rolled around. Like me, she was a visual learner, and she was one of the only speakers to use props to get her points across: a cat's cradle to illustrate how our lives interconnect, baskets and



# Chieko's FUNERAL ADDRESS

August 10, 2011 | By Carol Lee Hawkins • Provo, Utah

I always thought I was one of Chieko's closest friends. She would share her life with me, patiently teaching me and enlarging my understanding. She'd remind me to laugh and enjoy life. But mainly, she gently showed me the way to our Savior with acts of Christian service. Her words softened my heart and reminded me not to be discouraged but to carry on, knowing that what I offered the Lord and those around me was enough. I always felt better after I'd been with her. She was my dear friend.

Occasionally Chieko and I would slip away to an outlet mall just to look—of course. Without fail, I'd turn my back, leaving Chieko to roam the racks, and when I'd return I'd find a woman with tears rolling down her cheeks, talking to Chieko. At first I couldn't imagine what Chieko had said to bring forth this reaction. Then I realized that she hadn't uttered a word. Instead, a total stranger who knew her only through her books or talks had approached her and poured out her heart in gratitude. Within seconds, these two sisters bonded. And this stranger became "another close friend" of Chieko's. Everyone—and I mean everyone—became her "dear friend."

I'm sure all of us here today feel the same way. And, tens of thousands all over the world also claim Chieko as a treasured friend just from watching, listening to, and reading her sermons. Many of us call her simply "Chieko," a signal of the close bonds that bind us together.

For Chieko, the world of friendship and closeness was unlimited. She was not fenced in by the notion that one could only have a few "close friends." She was free to bond with many. Chieko modeled the principles of Christ's life in her own and shared those principles with everyone. Like Jesus, she could talk with the modern-day woman at the well, or the outcast fallen by the wayside, and give them much needed succor and hope. She was a friend to all.

Who would have guessed that a little Japanese girl from the Big Island could touch, inspire, and love so many of us? Her influence

around the world is especially startling when you consider her past. Chieko was born to "goodly parents" of humble means. Her mother and father spoke pigeon English and had minimal educations. She was born at a time when class distinctions were rigid; she found herself in a culture that assigned her the bottom rung of society. She knew her place — she was the kitchen help in a world of white haole privilege.

With so many restrictions imposed on her, Chieko should have grown up to be the ultimate conformist. Yet somehow, these cultural rules and social taboos did not limit her. As the scriptures say, "the truth shall make you free," and so it did with

Chieko. Her conversion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ at an early age gave her a new framework — a new culture to build her life around—one unrestricted by societal norms, one that embraced truth and goodness in any shape, form, or color.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ gave her simple principles, profound direction, and strength to continue on with her education, her church service, her community work, and, most importantly, with raising her family.

Under difficult circumstances, those principles gave her stability in the midst of the cultural and social revolutions of her times. Indeed, Chieko was part of that first generation of Japanese-Hawaiians to attend university, be elected to government office, and become successful businessmen and women. Such change is often chaotic, but Chieko's eyes were clearly focused on her newfound gospel, a culture filled with powerful principles and led by a brilliant, capable, and divine leader—Jesus Christ.

Chieko didn't wave placards or stage sit-ins to fight generations of discrimination and injustice. She simply held to the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and joyfully moved forward with

*"Who would have guessed that a little Japanese girl from the Big Island could touch, inspire, and love so many of us?"*





*Photograph Provided by Jessica Steed • Phoenix, Arizona*

the community of saints creating a new Zion: A Zion that for her had no cultural, social, or economic boundaries; a Zion where there was room for all; a Zion with an extra-special welcome for the downcast, the needy, the poor, and the hurting.

That was her gift, her genius. She didn't see boundaries and barriers, just possibilities to be reached through principles taught by her Savior. Indeed, Chieko often reminded us of this with the power of one of her favorite statements: "In principles great clarity, in practices great charity."

Just as she lived her life with simplicity, clarity, and charity, so also she taught. And oh, how she taught! Do you remember these? [Carol Lee holds up paddles] Who can forget Chieko bringing these canoe paddles to the Tabernacle to teach us about faith and study? Who can forget her playing Cat's Cradle or spinning her yo-yos from the pulpit to illustrate gospel principles? Who can forget how she shared her personal hardships and pain, which in turn gave us permission to talk about our own? Who can forget the spirit and call to action that she inspired in us every time she spoke? Chieko taught as though she were talking to each one of us as a trusted friend. And by the end of her sermons, we truly felt we could claim her as our own. She won

us over with the love of Christ.

This last year, when Chieko's physical heart failed her, when a lack of oxygen restricted her ability to speak, Chieko spent her limited energy expressing love, gratitude, and thanks to family, friends and strangers. In that, she found great peace and pleasure.

Chieko understood the transformative power of charity and love. She knew her Savior and basked in the joy of His constant companionship. She wouldn't want us to worry about her. She would want us to reach out to each other and to our Savior. I believe her parting advice to us would be similar to that of Moroni at the conclusion of the Book of Mormon.

"Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons [and daughters] of God; that when he shall appear ye shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope that we may be purified even as he is pure."

This is my prayer for all of us. I say this in the name of Chieko's closest friend, Jesus Christ, Amen. ✨

*'Birds of Paradise'. by Stefanie Carson Nickolaisen • Phoenix, Arizona*



# Crossing the Threshold

*"...with a mental image of both Chieko and Christ bearing me up at my elbows, I made it across the threshold and said goodbye to my mother. It was the most terrifying and courageous thing I have ever done." | By Linda Hoffman Kimball • Evanston, Illinois*

In July of 1994 my two sisters and I arrived at the door to our mother's hospital room. Mom was in a coma as a result of a massive stroke. The doctors told us there was no quality of life left and that Mom (who had been a nurse) had a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order. We hoped that she wouldn't linger too long in her coma, just long enough for us to say our goodbyes.

But I couldn't say goodbye. My sisters walked right into her room where she lay. I had flown in to do this very thing, and I simply couldn't do it.

I couldn't cross the threshold. I just couldn't go in the room. It was as impossible to walk into that room as if a steel wall barred the way. Even as I felt this urgent physical paralysis at the door to her room, I knew it wasn't rational, which, on top of everything else, was embarrassing. Of course there wasn't anything blocking the door. But I felt absolutely incapable of saying goodbye.

That night I mourned over my inability to go in to see and touch my mom. I remembered these powerful verses in Matthew 11 (28-29):

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

I was more heavy laden and fraught than at any other time of my life. As much as I tried to lean on Jesus, at that moment He wasn't tangible enough. I craved more substantial reassurance.

*"We talk in great generalities... about the suffering of the entire human family. But we don't experience pain in generalities. We experience it individually.... There is nothing you have experienced as a woman that he does not also know and recognize. His last recorded words to his disciples were, 'And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' " (Matt 28:20) Chieko Okazaki*

Then another thought came. The last time I focused on that scripture was hearing Chieko Okasaki at the Marriott Center in Provo. It was about a year after her husband's death. She spoke about those verses and of her grief, her love, her loss. She spoke about Christ's invitation to take His yoke upon us in such times, and how that meant being yokemates with the Savior who had overcome all. Together we could manage. Together with Christ, she had managed. She spoke about the boundless love the Savior has for us. She spoke about how much she loved us—each of us in that vast arena.

I believed her. I believed every word she spoke.

D&C 46:14 says, "To [some] it is given to believe on the words of [others], that they also might have eternal life. ..." This was a gift granted me by God through Chieko. She was tangible, and I believed her.

The next day, with a mental image of both Chieko and Christ

bearing me up at my elbows, I made it across the threshold and said goodbye to my mother. It was the most terrifying and courageous thing I have ever done. I held her hand and spoke to her. I prayed for her. Through the power of my faith I blessed her and thanked her and wished her well on her journey.

Mom lingered on two more weeks before she died, and I took another occasion or two to visit her unconscious self. My sisters and I were primarily busy getting her chaotic affairs in order and bolstering each other up as we sorted through her belongings.

I sent a note to Chieko—who didn't know me from Eve—explaining how instrumental she had been in helping me through this grim passage. She wrote back a simple, loving note. I attended a couple of women's retreats where she was the vibrant, compassionate speaker. I introduced myself quietly as the "one you helped when my mother died," but I had the feeling that there were millions of us who had intimate and personal spiritual encounters because Chieko was the instrument through which God performed miracles. I attended her funeral last August and learned just how true that was.

Thank you, Chieko. Aloha. ❀

## POETRY

### *Redemption*

KAREN KELSAY • ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Today I'm scrubbing chocolate spots  
after gathering the neighbor child's  
ribbons from my damask chair,  
thinking how her fidgety hands  
have smeared the French windows  
and left Popsicle prints across my gilded  
light switch. I watch her towhead  
bobbing across the lawn beyond  
the bougainvillea as she threatens to twist  
off the geranium blooms  
and capture the cat.

Our extra bedroom has become  
a collecting place for this gremlin's  
wardrobe, complete with jewelry stand,  
pairs of black heeled shoes, sparkling  
little Capezios and grimy-footed tights  
I dutifully wash by hand in the porcelain  
sink each evening, after I iron miniature  
clothes and slip peanut butter sandwiches  
into a backpack layered with homework,  
then kiss her goodnight and walk her home--  
thinking how sometimes in this life,  
we are offered redemption.

### *Little Girl Lost*

JANAE VAN DE KERK • PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Do you hear the cries of the child,  
the child no one sees?  
The child who tried so desperately  
everyone to please?

The child never meant to cause sorrow,  
she just wanted happiness  
But with the child now resides  
pain, confusion, and aloneness.

The child retreated alone in her pain,  
withdrawing to a place no one can find.  
Hiding from the world that hurt her so much,  
the child exists only in her mind.

In the darkness the child often dreams  
of you comforting her by your side.  
The child dreams of your loving embrace,  
your arms and heart opened wide.

Mourn for the child that was,  
the child who never had a chance to be.  
Look for the child hiding deep within  
for that frightened child was me.



# A NEW KIND OF *Pioneer*

*"I was pleased to see the Spring 2012 volume dealing with LGBTQ journeys of faith. How refreshing and close to my heart. After I read the volume, I just had to put my feelings down on paper and share them. Thank you for compelling me to express my words."* | By Kelly Montgomery • Lakewood, Washington

*M*y heart sank when I saw the envelope from the president of the Auburn Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My hands trembled and I held my breath as I read those black words on that white paper. Bishop's court.

I was 19 years old. I'm 43 now. I never went to the Bishop's court, but my family did. They provided the evidence needed to excommunicate me because I was a lesbian.

I have never been ashamed of my excommunication. I have been hurt, angry, indifferent, and glad, depending on where I was in my life. Over the past several years, I have been humbly proud.

My story isn't that much different than other lesbian Mormons, except, perhaps, that my partner and I are very much out and also very active in our ward. We live in Washington state. My partner and I have four kids aged from 16 years old to 17 months. Our Sunday mornings are no different from any other member's Sunday mornings ... hectically wrangling kids so we can be on time to church.

I want to say that we are pioneers. I tell myself this right before the sacrament prayers every week, when I try to find that place in my heart where I feel close to my Savior. I cannot take the sacrament, but as I listen to those sacred prayers, I covenant with my Father in Heaven how, in the upcoming week, I can "take upon me the name of thy Son" and "always remember Him" and how even though I'm gay, He shed his blood for me. I think about how I can remember Him as I'm going about my days, at work and with my partner and kids, and I renew my belief that His Spirit will be with me if I but try. I watch others place the bread on their tongues and tip their heads back partaking of the water. Sometimes I can't help but wonder if they know how fortunate they are to be able to engage in such a sacred and wonderful ordinance.

As I sit in Gospel Doctrine and Relief Society, I often reflect on how I would cherish the privilege of being able to teach a lesson or say a prayer or bear my testimony. There have been so many times when I've felt that fire burning in my spirit where my legs nearly lifted me off the bench and propelled me forward to share my sincere beliefs with my brothers and sisters during a fast and testimony meeting. In February 2011, our little guy was blessed during sacrament meeting. How I longed to hold him in my arms and express from the pulpit my love for my Father in Heaven, my Elder Brother, my partner, and my precious children.

I wished to bear testimony that I believed in personal revelation because I knew from the first time I saw our sweet little boy that he was meant to be my child, even though I had not birthed him.

*"We love our kids, we pray together, we have Family Home Evening, our kids go to mutual and seminary, we have a lovely home where we do our best to live the Gospel. Some may believe that we don't live the Gospel because we defy the Church's position on homosexuality."*

How I long to pay tithing and fast offerings. How I wish for a calling. My partner and I serve where we're allowed; we make a lot of meals for missionaries and for members who are sick or recovering from childbirth. I'm a lawyer, so I often give legal advice to those in need. It isn't nearly enough, though. My heart longs to serve.

I am happy to say that we have been treated pretty kindly by the membership in our ward. We have never hidden our relationship. I think the majority of the members in our ward see that our family is really not much different from their own families: We love

our kids, we pray together, we have Family Home Evening, our kids go to Mutual and Seminary, we have a lovely home where we do our best to live the gospel. Some may believe that we don't live the gospel, because we defy the Church's position on homosexuality. That is an interesting conversation. My partner and I are registered domestic partners—we're as married as we can be.

I wish I could have the prophet sit down with my family during dinner and spend a little time with us. The prophet seems to

be so wise, so loving and caring—I believe he would leave our humble home feeling the Spirit that is here. It is a Spirit of love and teaching, forgiveness and repentance, acceptance and striving. He'd see our kids thriving and happy. He'd see a loving, committed relationship between two women who adore each other and work hard at raising a successful family.



ARTWORK: Love is Spoken Here, by Scott Heffernan, Seattle, Washington

Lately, I've been humbly proud about my excommunication. One might ask why. The simple answer is that being a non-member has made me a better Mormon. I can't take anything for granted, from the simplest act of service to the most complex parenting challenge. I do not know what the hereafter holds for my partner and myself, but my prayers in that regard have been answered. I don't really need to know the details, because the soft whisperings of the Spirit tell me I'm okay and that we'll be okay. It's an interesting perspective for me, because as a lawyer, I act as an advocate for something. The Savior is my advocate. We are blessed as a family every day and even though my membership has been taken away, I do not believe that the Holy Ghost has left me.

I am a pioneer. I probably won't have anything to do with great worldwide understanding or acceptance of gay Mormon families, but I might have an impact on the person who sits in the pew behind me, and I know I have an impact on my children.



## POETRY

### *Mary's Letter to Elizabeth*

KATHRYN W. HALES • ELLENSBURG, WASHINGTON

Oh, Elizabeth! How my heart yearns  
 To see you again,  
 To feel your comforting arms  
 Around me  
 As they did in the "first months"  
 Away from the piercing eyes  
 And prying lips of Nazareth,  
 The looks of accusation,  
 The words of shame.  
 You were my solace and retreat,  
 For you knew the Spirit's voice also,  
 Announcing sons for your barren womb (a  
 son)  
 And my virgin one,  
 Sons of destiny for each of us  
 According to God's miracles.  
 Who knows when our paths  
 May cross again?  
 We both fled from Herod's wrath,  
 You to the desert as a widow,  
 From which you have never returned,  
 Myself to a foreign land,  
 Then returning to my village  
 That all the prophecies  
 Of God's servants might be fulfilled.  
 When will our sons meet?  
 For to meet they must —  
 Your John, my Jesus —  
 For together they have a mighty work to  
 perform,  
 Whose end we cannot comprehend.  
 Our lives, first bonded by blood,  
 Are inextricably linked by spirit,  
 And history will forever think of us together.  
 We, two mothers,  
 Have only been allowed to see the beginning,  
 But in our God-given natures  
 We will nurture and love  
 to the end that all might  
 Receive immortality and eternal life  
 To God's glory.



# FINDING OUR DIVINE POTENTIAL *through Relief Society*

*"...the work of Relief Society is to progress, grow, and become like our Heavenly Mother. Each act of becoming our full self is the work of Relief Society."* | By Brenda Thomas • Hurricane, Utah

I offered to speak today only if I could speak on the history of Relief Society. March 17, 2012, marked 170 years since the first meeting of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. As we look to the past and the great work that Relief Society sisters have done throughout its history, I hope all of us will find renewed vigor to stand up and make good things happen today.

I have always loved the Relief Society. My mother instilled this in me by her example of attending her Relief Society meetings and fully participating with the sisters. She still loves serving in the Relief Society, but it was not until I moved to the Boston area that Relief Society became deeply important to me. It was there that I had several Sunday lessons on the history of Relief Society. I soon started reading and researching on my own. I wanted to learn more about the exciting things that Relief Society sisters had done in the past.

This history became especially real and significant to me when I was asked to teach a Relief Society lesson on the Singing Mothers. These choirs of women were organized in each ward, stake, and mission throughout the world. There was also a general Singing Mothers Choir composed of women from the Salt Lake City area that was featured on radio and television. These groups of Relief Society sisters performed at sacrament meetings and stake and district conferences, and were even occasionally bused to larger events like General Conferences and Worlds Fairs. My own grandma, Margaret Church Callister, performed with the Singing Mothers when she was a mother of young children. When I asked

my grandma about her experience, I could feel her enthusiasm over the phone from 2,000 miles away. She said she was thrilled to sing with the Singing Mothers, and shared what a welcome break it had been from her daily life.

I have also learned from sisters in my current ward about their experiences in the Relief Society. While recently visiting with an older sister, she shared childhood memories of going with her mother to homes where a new baby had been born. This was about 100 years ago, before hospitals were available in rural and relatively newly settled Southern Utah, and babies were delivered at home. While visiting, the children would play outside the house, but at some time during the day, the new mother would tap on the window and show the children the new baby. Her mother had been the Relief Society president for years in Toquerville, Utah, and she attended to the new mothers, the sick, and the dying. The Relief Society sisters were always there to help.

As I learned of these and other personal experiences, I came to understand that this organization is much more than I had previously realized. These sisters showed me that the work of Relief Society is to reach beyond ourselves and our families to improve our communities and our world.

Throughout its history, Relief Society sisters all over the world have been engaged in this expansive work. They have been there to sew clothes for the destitute; to raise, store, and harvest grain for the hungry; to build hospitals and maternity wards; to train nurses and nurses' aides; and to find homes for adoptive babies and jobs for young women in need of employment. They have worked with the Red Cross in providing emergency aid, sewed bandages for the wounded, and prepared wartime bundles to send to those in war-torn countries. They have written stories for and edited their own magazine (for over 100 years—*The Women's Exponent* and *The Relief Society Magazine*), they have taught literature lessons on Shakespeare



Julie B. Beck



Frances Beverly Monson

and Emerson, and cultural refinement lessons on Brazil and Germany. They have worked with other women in national and international organizations to promote understanding and peace across religious and national boundaries.<sup>[1]</sup> Relief Society sisters have served as missionaries sharing the gospel. They have held bazaars and written books to raise money to construct their own buildings, aid their neighbors, and carry out worldwide humanitarian projects. They have been women of action. When they saw a need, they stood up and worked to make things better.

Why did these early Relief Society sisters do all of these things? What was the impetus to go out into the world and make a difference? Wouldn't it have been easier to stay home and focus on their own families? To say that changing the world was someone else's job?

One of the greatest works Relief Society sisters have been involved in would seem to some to have been better left to others: women's suffrage. It was in 1870 when Utah was still a territory that women met together in the Tabernacle to protest the anti-polygamy bill that had just been passed in Congress. Three thousand women gathered at the Tabernacle; the only men present were reporters, and they were impressed with the intelligence, courage, and strength of these Mormon women. When the leading Relief Society sisters stood up to speak, five out of the 13 speakers "made connections between their personal and religious freedom and their rights as citizens and as women."<sup>[2]</sup> They asked for the right to vote. It was a month later that women gained the franchise in the Utah territory. But the fight for women's suffrage did not end there. With subsequent anti-polygamy bills, all women and Mormon men were denied the franchise. Years later, when Utah finally achieved statehood, the women did not sit back idly, waiting for someone else to speak up for them. They organized, petitioned, and worked tirelessly to get the Utah state constitution to include their right to vote. These women gained that right, for good, almost 25 years before the 19th amendment gave the franchise to women across the United States.

I hope that their work has not been in vain. I hope that we take seriously this right that Relief Society leaders worked so diligently to bring to pass. Do you really look at the issues before you go in to vote? Do you look at all the possibilities, choosing the best from all sources before you decide whom to vote for? When I look at political issues, I seek for that which fits best with what I believe, regardless of political parties, and in doing this I am following the example of my Relief Society ancestors, who took their rights seriously and worked hard for what they believed in.

In the spring of 1842, when Sarah Kimball and Miss Cook wanted to create a society of women to make shirts for the men building the temple in Nauvoo, they had in mind a group that would give service and would enjoy socializing together. When Joseph Smith heard about the proposed society, he said he had something better in store for the sisters. He knew the sisters could do greater work than sewing, and he knew that their eternal salvation depended on it. Joseph Smith's vision of the Relief Society was centered on preparing the women of the Church to receive the ordinances of the temple. He had already given the temple endowment to men by the time the Relief Society was organized, but he knew that neither the temple ordinances nor the Church were complete without women receiving them as well.

And so, when Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society on March 17, 1842, he gave the sisters the keys to administer their own society and receive their own revelation. He intended the work to lead them to a fuller understanding of themselves, their duties, and their possibilities. This was accomplished not only through women serving in the Relief Society but also through their participation in temple ordinances. The temple endowment symbolically moves us in an upward progression as we advance in knowledge. The eternal goal is not only to enter the presence of our heavenly parents but also to become like them. Thus, the work of Relief Society is to progress, grow, and become like our Heavenly Mother. Each act of becoming our full self is the work of Relief Society. This is not limited to spiritual things. We are not whole and complete if we only read scriptures all day. The work of Relief Society encompasses all that we do to develop our talents in service to others and in becoming our best selves.

One hundred years ago, Ruth May Fox, third General President of the Young Women, wrote a play based on Jesus'



Emma Smith



Chicco N. Okazaki



Gladys Knight



Claudia Bushman



Laurel Thatcher Ulrich





Marjorie Pay Hinckley



Patty Bartlett  
Sessions



Maud May Babcock



Sheri DeW



Louisa Barnes Pratt



Barbara W.  
Winder

parable of the ten talents. It portrays Heavenly Mother with her daughters in the premortal life. She gives each young woman a gift, such as wisdom, love, and endurance. They are sent forth into the world to see what they will make of their talents. At the end of the play, Heavenly Mother returns to her daughters to get a report of what they did with their gifts.

We also have been given gifts and talents by our Heavenly Parents, who love us and are watching over us. When we work to develop and use these talents and gifts, we are not only following the examples of our Relief Society ancestors, but we are also doing the work of Relief Society in our day. Although we are no longer asked by our Relief Society leaders to stock our own stores with homemade goods or to train as nurses or to raise our own silk worms, we can still creatively do Relief Society work in our wards, communities, and the world.

As one Relief Society sister, Claudia Bushman, has said, “It is not as important to find the right thing to do, which may not exist, as it is to do something. Action must be taken.”<sup>[3]</sup> This is the work of the Relief Society: to stand up using our talents to make positive things happen, and I see women doing it all around me. I see women working diligently to teach children in our schools; I see women serving others in the medical profession as nurses, nurse practitioners, doctors, and dentists; I see women helping to improve our parks and play areas; and I see others who contribute greatly to community events. I know women who have started non-profit organizations to take dental supplies and care to children in orphanages in Bolivia, to build homes in Uganda, to educate children in Jordan, and to stop pornography in the United States. These are all Relief Society sisters; they are all doing Relief Society work.

*“When I look at political issues, I seek for that which fits best with what I believe, regardless of political parties, and in doing this I am following the example of my Relief Society ancestors who took their rights seriously and worked hard for what they believed in.”*

And so I would ask: What are you doing with the gifts and talents given you by Heavenly Parents? Have you found your niche, your special place where you can serve? Are you stretching yourself, expanding your vision and standing up and doing something in the world? Now, none of us are exactly like

Eliza R. Snow, Emmeline B. Wells, or Belle Spafford. We are all unique and different, and that is why our work as Relief Society sisters will all be different. But we all have an important work to do, and we will be held accountable by our Heavenly Parents for the Relief Society work we do here with the gifts we have been given.

Let us each examine our lives and evaluate how we are using our time and talents. And let each of us stand up and do something in the world to make it a better place. In doing this, we are fulfilling the work of Relief Society and becoming like our Heavenly Mother, which is our ultimate goal. ❄

[1] The Relief Society was a charter member of the International Council of Women from its founding in 1888 and the United States National Council of Women from 1891. Women in the Relief Society actively participated in these councils, often in leadership roles, until 1987. (See Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, and Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1992]; pp. 137-138.)

[2] Lola Van Wagenen, *Sister-Wives and Suffragists: Polygamy and the Politics of Woman Suffrage 1870-1896* (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1994, published by Joseph Fielding Smith Institute and BYU Studies, 2004).

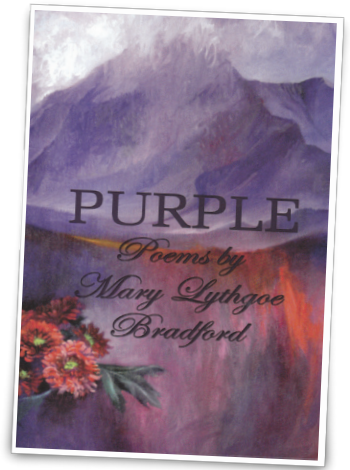
[3] Claudia Bushman, *The Lives of Mormon Women* (2006 FAIR Conference).



# Book Reviews

## PURPLE: POEMS BY MARY LYTHGOE BRADFORD

Reviewed By Elouise Bell • Edmond, Oklahoma



Every good poem is a story, even if it is not a narrative. And every good story is true, even if it did not actually happen.

In Mary Lythgoe Bradford's collection, *Purple*, (Dialogue Foundation, Salt Lake City, 2009), the poems tell stories so rich that each can be mined for many different rewards. Few writers speak so frankly and freshly about love in the Crone years, so honestly about married love, so deliciously about the taste of words. But for me, the theme most powerfully presented is that of the Eternal Female—complex, confounded, short-changed, enlightened, and relentlessly triumphant.

"I Remember" charts the treacherous path. The girl of Five gains confidence from tying her shoes, a confidence that soon splinters. Baptized at Eight, securely held by her father, she regains confidence enough to imitate Icarus, her chicken-wire wings defying gravity itself. She plays baseball at Twelve, but the apples are now rotten for young Eve, and she looks about for rescue, "already searching for power/outside my own body." At Fourteen, her body mocks her with a bloody stain: "Betrayal lay behind every tree/ in the orchard." Entire novels have dramatized this road less vividly.

The poem "My Brothers" draws a graph of the rise and fall of power often experienced by older sisters. One brother is at first a confidante and companion, another the baby brother, in the narrator's charge, "waiting for rescue," snatched from danger. But then "I become his charge. . . / I move protected /in my brothers' world." Males grow from limitation to strength, from protected to protecting, but for females, the vigorous, self-assured innocence of girlhood is often as high as they fly. First-born status is definitive only if you are a male.

Bradford gives the reader several poems in which the story's depth is veiled, to explode only in the final line. In the intriguing verse, "To Grendel," she tells the Gothic tale of the Monster who comes "slogging through the swamp," catches and raises the Maiden above his head, where she can see the stars and dream of flying. But disaster prevails; she feels the claws, sees the jaws, the red entrails, and, yes, possibly a "flash of love" in the monstrous eye.

Unsure, the Maiden asks: "Was it only the last branch of sky reflecting/so it's you swallowed me and set me free"? The power of that final line vibrates like a gong long after we've read the poem. How does being devoured set the Maiden free? Free from what? To do what? Live free from the stress of making any choice at all?

If the System is determined to diminish the Female, Bradford's woman is relentless in her resistance to that fate. She speaks ironically, sarcastically and fully awake in "To the Surgeon," giving him "permission," saying, "Whittle me down to size," "excise the hopes that refuse to die." This Woman has a larger presence than the System finds comfortable. So out comes the blade, to cut through "this expanse of thigh/these hanging garden breasts, / these folds called hips." Most threateningly, the blade is invited to the eye and the brain, wherein reside the truest conception of Self, the strongest confidence, as well as the rarest treasures of faith and hope. Go for the lobotomy, the Woman taunts; otherwise, she will indeed "try again."

In a hugely insightful poem, the narrator's adult Self speaks to her child Self, explaining "The Difference" between the pain the girl child has felt at being thwarted, and her own ongoing agony. The child "cannot suffer nobly nor fling a wild/curse at the sky and die,/ she can only flinch and cry." The tragic suffering, the clenched fist, the wild curse of the Woman belong to the Heroic tradition: "You are pathos, I the protagonist." The difference is between being done to ... and doing.

Make no mistake. Mary Bradford, in this extraordinary collection, is indeed *doing*, with power, wit, and deep insight not cheaply bought. Poet Jo Harjo has said, "Sometimes people need stories more than they need bread." My reading of Mormon women's writings, especially on major blogsites such as Feminist Mormon Housewives, convinces me Mormon women are hungry for substantial true stories. *Purple* is nourishment to make the soul fly. ❀



# THE BOOK OF MORMON GIRL: A MEMOIR OF AN AMERICAN FAITH

Author: Joanna Brooks

Reviewed By Lisa Patterson Butterworth • Boise, Idaho

With a possible impending Mormon presidency, it seems like everyone is trying to figure out the Mormons. Now is the perfect time to hand out a copy of *The Book of Mormon Girl*. Joanna Brooks has a knack for telling stories that are simultaneously relatable to all human experience and full of peculiar Mormoniness. She opens the memoir during a Family Home Evening and within the first several pages she manages to organically explain embodied Mormon theology, convey the richness and purpose of Mormon family life, and charm my socks right off.

More than any one detail, the richness of Brooks' narrative illustrates a truth that is very hard to communicate to someone who is not familiar with Mormons, namely, how deeply Mormonism shapes a person's entire worldview. Every small choice can take on peculiar significance—Brooks did not just choose a root beer over a Coke, her choice was meant to separate herself from "the world," demonstrating her devotion to God. She was not just a Marie Osmond fangirl. No, Osmond was her guide as she strived for perfection and prepared herself for eternal salvation. Every earthquake, every skirmish was a sign that the millenium was nigh:

*What a gift it was growing up in a world taut with conflict and luminous with meaning. Time was not empty . . . No. Time was a vector of godly intention, the fractal plume of something expansive and infinite, and my purpose—and I knew it—to discern the patterns of its unfolding.*

Yes! That is how it feels to be a Mormon girl. It feels powerful, important, and fraught with purpose. Purpose in dancing together, purpose in singing together, purpose in being together as Mormons. And it explains so perfectly the deep rejection she felt when it seemed that the Church no longer wanted her.

I was blissfully unaware of the Mormon happenings in the late 80s and 90s when Joanna experienced first-hand the revival of Mormon feminism at BYU and then subsequent firings and excommunications of her mentors and dear friends. I wish I could have sat with Brooks in classes from Eugene England and Cecilia Conchar Farr, to learn with them that "all are alike unto God."

But as with any story, some parts of my own Mormon story resembled Brooks' and others did not. I, too, had giant tins of food storage wheat hidden under the stairs. I loved my pragmatic Young Women leaders, heard my fair share of horrifying object lessons,

and learned to put the matter of polygamy on the shelf. But I was not a root beer among Cokes. I lived in small town Utah, a root beer among root beers. And it never even occurred to me to apply to BYU. I can't think of any of my root beer peers who went to BYU. Perhaps it was too expensive? None of us had ever heard of Eugene England or noticed that a purge was taking place.

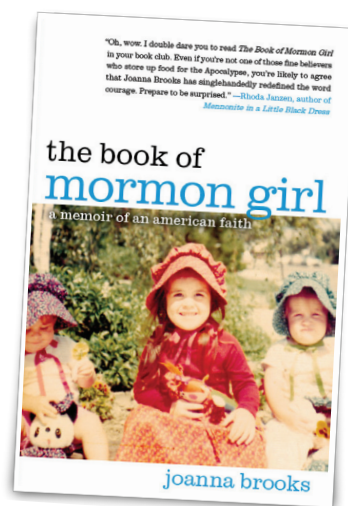
While I never heard Packer declare that feminists, intellectuals, and homosexuals were a threat to the Church, nor experienced Brooks' intense and dramatic front-seat view of the purge, I still knew and feared, as the first glimmers of my feminist awakening arrived, that if anyone heard my questions, if anyone knew of my doubts, that I too would feel deep rejection when the Church no longer wanted me.

These similarities and differences are the reasons we all need to tell our stories. It is vital to hear stories from like-minded folk to affirm our experiences, but it is also with these familiar details that we build a bridge back to those who haven't struggled with questions or felt the subsequent rejection. Hopefully they too can see pieces of themselves in us and gain empathy.

What drives people to leave the Church? Is it the questions or is it the instant rejection, the hurt, the confusion we feel from our community the minute those questions arrive? We all know how the packaged story goes: they were "offended"; They took the "truth to be too hard"; they wanted to sin and they left. These narratives have been

packaged and we have internalized them, believing that perhaps we really don't deserve to belong after all. By telling our stories, those dismissive narratives must give way to complex realities.

Joanna Brooks' memoir has opened the door for others to share in the experience of many hurting, questioning members who often get left out of the official Mormon story. I love the Church, and it will always be my home—not in a temporal, casual way but in a bone-deep, blood of my ancestors, shaper of my past, present, and eternal future way. I want my story to be told. And Joanna Brooks has beautifully added to that telling—for all of us. ✨



*"Joanna Brooks' memoir has opened the door for others to share in the experience of many hurting, questioning members who often get left out of the official Mormon story."*

# TWO MORMON *Feminists* WALK INTO A BAR...

*Who says  
feminists can't  
be funny?*



**[HEY GIRL]**

*Don't I know  
you from the  
pre-earth life?*

This summer, we wanted to try something different at *Exponent II*: a humor feature! So we asked you, our dear readers, to tell us your funny Mormon feminist stories. Then, we discovered the Mormon “Hey Girl” Ryan Gosling memes<sup>[1]</sup> created by three Salt Lake City women, all recent high school graduates, and we knew they’d complement these stories perfectly.

In January 2009, the first Ryan Gosling memes began to appear on the Internet. With a candid picture of the actor and a silly made-up quote always beginning with, “Hey Girl,” fans would have Ryan say what they most wanted to hear, such as, “Hey Girl, can I kiss you through the phone?” Variations of this theme could be found on Tumblr,<sup>[2]</sup> but it was Tumblr’s Feminist Ryan Gosling that got our attention this past fall when Ryan moved from the usual come-on lines — “Hey Girl, sorry my shirt fell off” — to some pithy feminist critiques: “Sometimes I think about Foucault’s theory of marriage as a governmentally developed tool that interferes with the appropriation of land rights, normalizes heterosexuality, and subjugates a woman’s sexuality, and it makes me want to cry with you.”

It was in this vein that Ellen Lewis, Sagan Gotberg, and Whitney Paige came up with “Mormon Hey Girl” this winter, but instead of feminist critiques, they offer hilarious references to Mormon culture and doctrine. Given Ryan Gosling’s Mormon upbringing, it seems all the more plausible that he might just ask one lucky girl if he could be her stripling warrior.

1.] A meme is an idea, spread visually on the Web as a video, website, or, in this case, picture.

2.] Tumblr is a short-form blogging platform that specializes in quick, often visual entries, as opposed to traditional text-rich blogs.

## *True Doctrine In Relief Society*

After graduating from BYU, I spent most of my early adult life in some of the more liberal university wards of the Church—Berkeley, CA, Cambridge, MA, Hyde Park, IL—where feminist concerns were regularly part of the discussion in Relief Society. When I moved to Los Angeles, I soon discovered that such concerns were at best suspect, at worst unwelcome, in my new ward. After one particular lesson, during which I made what I thought to be a rather tame feminist observation, my Relief Society president pulled me aside. She told me she thought my comment was disruptive of her mission as she saw it, which

was to ensure that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ was taught in her Relief Society, and suggested, without irony, that I’d probably be happier in Elder’s Quorum.

Perhaps she was right. She called later that evening to apologize, much to her credit, and sheepishly added, “I spoke with [my husband] about what happened. He grinned and said, ‘No one expects the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be taught in Elder’s Quorum.’”

**-LORIE WINDER STROMBERG • LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA**



## *Feminist Party Favors*

On March 8, 1992, I was teaching English in China. Our city, Qingdao, invited all the foreign teachers to attend a celebration in honor of International Women's Day. We were assured this was a very big deal, with special speakers, a fancy meal, and special party favors. The truth is, none of these events were optional. At least once a month the city would invite/order us foreigners to attend some event or another. And the food that was meant to impress us was horrifying to a picky eater like me. Spare me your "delicacies" like silk worm larvae, sea slug, and cow tendon and give me some freakin' sweet and sour chicken. But I digress.

The 12 of us expats arrived at the Qingdao Hotel ballroom, took our seats, and wondered how on earth women would be celebrated by the very patriarchal group of Communist officials. First there were speeches. All by men. Art work was displayed. By male artists. A band played. Yup, not a skirt in the bunch. One of the teachers there, a woman name Gede, was a very traditional Iranian and wore the chador. I knew things were bad when Gede started to get angry and was murmuring in Farsee under her breath.

Sometimes things get so nutty that they cross over into the hysterical. At first we were shocked, then offended, but by the end of the ceremony we were all trying very hard not to laugh out loud. And that's when they gave us our goody bags. Fran, another teacher at my school, opened hers first and pulled out several giant maxi pads. Jean, a British teacher said, "Is that a sanitary napkin?!" Yes. Our party/panty favors were a bag full of the biggest Kotex pads you have ever seen. We all lost it. Tears streamed down our faces. "Well," I said, "it's the only truly female thing about this celebration." The post-menopausal among us were going to trash the favors but I collected them all. I had recently purchased a gorgeous set of dishes with imperial dragons on them and had been wondering how I was going to ship them safely back to the States. That night I peeled off the tabs on the bottom of the pads and securely affixed two to each dish and stacked them into a box. Thanks to the thoughtfulness of Qingdao's Communist Party officials, not a single dish broke! Hooray for Women!

-HEATHER SUNDAHL | BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS



## **[HEY GIRL]**

*Do you believe  
in modern day  
revelation?*

*Because, girl,  
you are a vision!*

## *Holy Crap!*

My sister and I hiked an active volcano while she was visiting me in Guatemala. We were hiking with a group of about 15 back-packing tourists. The last 20 minutes of the hike to reach the summit were over glass-sharp lava rock and we were all treading very carefully so as not to slip and shred a hand if we tried to stop a fall. To reach the summit and peer into the hot molten lava flow we had to make a single file line, since only one person could peer at a time. One after another, as each person saw the lava and felt the heat sizzle at their eyebrows, each did the most natural thing most people would: toss out an explicative. Waiting in line we heard one after another, until my sister, from Utah, had her turn: "Holy Crap!"

-ADRIANA SMITH • ECUINTLA, GUATEMALA

## *The Powerful "P"*

During sharing time, the counselor in the Primary presidency was teaching the assigned weekly lesson from the outline, which on this particular week was about the Priesthood. She began by playing the game, "Try to guess the word." These games never work for me, but she was giving it a try. So she gave the following clues: "This word starts with a 'P.' This word is something that is powerful and from God, and this is something that boys have but girls don't." The kids just sat there until one little girl yelled out "PENIS!" All the kids happily agreed.

-JESSICA FINNIGAN • OREM, UTAH

## *Terribly Scattered Sunshine*

One day about a year after we moved to the brutally desolate southwest, my then-two-year-old daughter and I went garage sale-ing, as was our new Saturday morning ritual. This particular Saturday, though, I was feeling uncomfortable about being nine-and-a-half months pregnant with our fourth child and being in a different and unfamiliar part of town.

As I pulled up to this particular garage sale at about 9:00 a.m., a huge boat of a car pulled up and parked right in front of me. Now this powder blue car was not only huge, it was lifted up on hydraulics, with little shiny spinning wheels, and its sound system was definitely one-of-a-kind. Four large Hispanic young men got out of the car at the same time I was getting my little daughter out of the minivan. The driver and I made eye contact, and I felt compelled to say something to him. But of course, I decided against an easy “Hello!” or “Good morning, sir!” and instead my mind raced to think of something to say to show how both cool and/or hip I am. So, with a big smile, I said, “Hey, looks like your ride’s been pimped!”

Thud.

It was the single most ridiculous thing I could have said. As soon as the words left my mouth—as if in slow motion—I wanted to retrieve them but alas, I could not. The men said nothing at first. They just stared at me and then turned to each other and started laughing. They clapped their hands, then walked up to us and started high-fiving and fist-bumping me. One said, “Look at the mamacita, talking about your ride, man!” and another patted my daughter on the head. Then they walked away from us, still laughing and addressing each other with a sort of British affectation, “Oy there, looks like your ride’s been pimped!”

As my daughter and I walked hand-in-hand and looked at the items at the picked-over garage sale, I smiled at the priceless value of friendliness. Joseph Addison said, “What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity. These are but trifles, to be sure; but, scattered along life’s pathway, the good they do is inconceivable.”

**-COREY LYNCH JOHNSON | ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO**

## *Contraband*

When my mother was nine months pregnant with her sixth child she waddled from store to store buying all the supplies the Church said the family would need in the undeveloped conditions of 1960s Samoa where my father would soon serve as principal of the LDS Church schools. She gave birth, and two weeks later flew to Samoa.

After three years and many tropical adventures involving giant rats, interesting parasites, and six wild red-heads without the modern convenience of sunscreen, it was time to move back to Utah. Mom decided that a red-eye flight to Hawaii was just the ticket—they’d keep the kids up late, shuffle them on the plane and watch them all fall peacefully to sleep for a quiet trip to the Rainbow State.

Ah, the best-laid plans. No one slept for the six-hour flight. There was screaming and fighting and vomiting. Every passenger on the plane loathed the entire pack of freckle-faced demon children. Including their parents.

As they arrived in Hawaii, the customs officer eyed my distraught mother, the surrounding tumult of bouncing, screaming ginger monsters, and the 16 boxes containing all of their earthly possessions. With clear trepidation he asked, “Do you have any alcohol, firearms, or narcotics to declare?”

My mom looked him in the eye and said, “Mister, if I had ‘em, I’d have used ‘em by now.”

He laughed and waved them through without a search.

**-LISA PATTERSON BUTTERWORTH • BOISE, IDAHO**



### **[HEY GIRL]**

*Is your name  
virtue?*

*Because you  
garnish my  
thoughts  
unceasingly.*



## Mistaken Identity

During a stop along the Seine River while traveling in France, everyone was sightseeing and I noticed my husband standing in front of me. I wrapped my arms around his waist from behind and, feeling a little risqué, I tucked my fingers into the front of his jeans. Not into his front pockets, but actually into his pants. I closed my eyes and rested my head on his back. He immediately tensed and I thought that was funny.

**"I hadn't been holding him more than a few seconds when I heard my husband saying, 'Heidi.'"**

I hadn't been holding him more than a few seconds when I heard my husband saying, "Heidi." Except the problem was the voice was not in front of me. My eyes flew open and I saw my husband standing about 10 feet away with an enormous smile on his face and waving at me. My face flushed. I quickly took my hands out of this strange man's pants and looked at him for the first time. He was old, bald, fat, and foreign. The only thing that he and my husband shared in common was that they were both wearing purple polo shirts. I tried to mutter an apology and he said something in a language I didn't understand as I ran away. I was humiliated rushing back to my husband and the small group of my family members laughing at me, but was even more humiliated when I discovered that this man was on our tour bus. Needless to say, he followed me around for the rest of the two weeks and my family still teases me about it.

~ HEIDI BRINKERHOFF SHIELDS • LODI, CALIFORNIA

## [HEY GIRL]

*Oh nothing, just sitting here... feeling the spirit.*



## [HEY GIRL]

*Of course I'll make you a hot breakfast before you have to be at Ward Council: you didn't even need to ask.*

## Deadly Sacrament

Sometime in 2000, we discovered that my husband Dave had developed a sesame allergy. So if he bit into a burger that had seeds on the bun, or any Chinese food that had come in contact with any seeds or oil (basically all of it), he'd get itchy, then red, then his throat would start closing.

One Sunday we're sitting in church wrestling three kids and I mindlessly grab a piece of bread from the sacrament tray and chew it. Mmmm. Savory. Crunchy. And then it clicks that I'm tasting sesame seeds. I look over at oblivious Dave who has the bread half way to his mouth and I dive across two kids to smack his hand away and shout in a stage whisper, "Don't take the sacrament!!!!"

Everyone in a six-foot radius goes stiff and silent. In the pew ahead of us are the Boston Temple President and Matron. She steals a glance at us and shakes her head. Dave was the Young Men president and the boy holding the tray for our row looked like he was going to cry as he imagined what sordid thing Dave must have done for me to literally knock the bread out of his sinning hand. I turned beet red and felt like I was going into anaphylactic shock. Being the center of attention is just fine by me, but being the center of a scene — I was mortified. Dave loved it. Thought it was hilarious.

~ HEATHER SUNDAHL | BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS

## Pearly Whites

When I was growing up in Provo, Utah, the magical creatures that were the focus of some teen girls' dreams were not vampires or werewolves . . . but *Osmonds*. Instead of the piercing gaze of a dashing young (or ancient) mystery man, the girls of my generation searched for a glimpse of a pearly white smile from the bright and beautiful faces of these local mystical beings.

Now, years later, I wonder what I could tell you about these often caricatured yet seldom understood creatures. First off, they are all absolutely as nice to mere mortals as they are to Oprah. Their toothy grins really can dazzle you from miles away, and if you've ever been to an Osmond missionary homecoming then you know what it feels like to be freshly bathed and decked in your Sunday best, and still be horribly aware that you will never shine like a thousand brand new pennies glowing in radiant beams of sunlight.

The Osmonds were a vivid presence in my childhood. I grew up within walking distance from Osmond Lane; my aunt was a make-up artist on the set of *The Donny and Marie Show* in the 1980's; and my dad briefly worked for Osmond Real Estate. In my K-12 years, I received items from various Osmond boys that included a Pound Puppy, a letterman jacket placed around my shoulders behind the Provo Temple, and even the occasional small bouquet of flowers in a hand-thrown pot. And as a newlywed, I spent many hours assisting Marie in the children's department of ZCMI fulfilling the requests of paper angels from the Sub-For-Santa Tree.

If this really were teen fiction, I suspect my supernatural power to attract a particular Osmond lay not so much in my alabaster skin or witty repertoire, as much as in the fact that I lived blocks from BYU and I was not Mormon. "Shhh . . . see that guy? He's an *Osmond*," could easily be whispered alongside, "Hey, that girl over there? I'm pretty sure she's a *heathen*." Not many devout Mormon boys only months away from their mission can resist practicing their sacred powers of proselytization, and a certain Osmond was no exception when he approached me, the cute colorguard captain in the band room. I think even an Osmond occasionally needs a break from the Utah Valley Mormons-only dating standard from time to time.

My sisters and I were probably the only girls in Utah County whose father forbade his daughters to ever marry an Osmond.

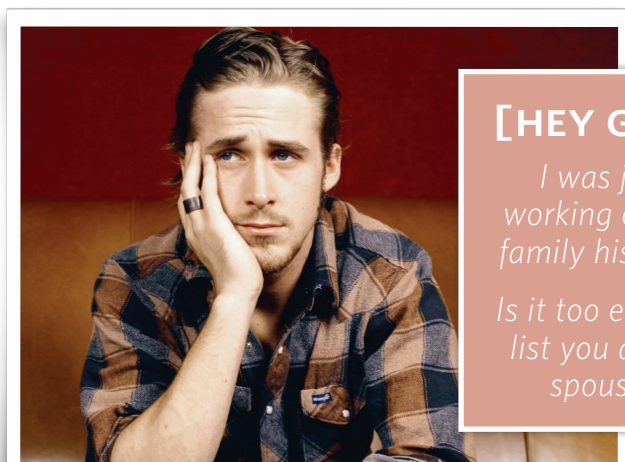
Couldn't we find ourselves a nice high school dropout with a motorcycle instead? As a rebellious teen, what better way to thumb my nose at parental authority than by wearing my sister's prom dress to the winter formal and holding hands, *fingers intertwined*, with an Osmond? In front of everyone! (Take that, Romeo and Juliet.)

**"Unfortunately, our star-crossed love didn't stand a chance against my inability to attend early-morning seminary. Rebellion isn't exactly fun when it involves getting ready in the dark and arriving a full hour before the rest of high school even unlocks its doors."**

Unfortunately, our star-crossed love didn't stand a chance against my inability to attend early-morning seminary. Rebellion isn't exactly fun when it involves getting ready in the dark and arriving a full hour before the rest of high school even unlocks its doors. It was over in three days.

In the end, I used up any remaining supernatural powers to snag myself an ex-Navy sailor eight years my senior that my dad (almost) immediately approved of. Then, with no supernatural powers that I know of, I made shining, marvelous people in my body who are probably at this very moment conspiring about how to someday find Osmonds of their own. Go for it, kids. There are a lot worse things out there besides pearly whites, intimidating hygiene, and impressive moral standards, even if it means for the rest of eternity people will ask you about your Uncle Donny before they remember to ask about you.

**- ALISSA KING | LAGUNA HILLS, CALIFORNIA**



### [HEY GIRL]

*I was just working on my family history...*

*Is it too early to list you as my spouse?*



# THE WOMAN'S EXPONENT

*The very first edition of the original Woman's Exponent contained a humor section called Pen and Scissors — proof that our foremothers appreciated a good laugh. This feature was ongoing, and we share a few jokes with you here. We are also reprinting one of the most requested pieces from Exponent II: "Patty Perfect." Finally, in this era of serious modesty — talk, enjoy a light-hearted look at nude photos from the Exponent Blog.*

**Woman's Exponent (WE) | Vol. 1: No. 3 | JULY 1, 1872:** Mrs. Drummond, the Quaker preacher, was asked whether the spirit ever inspired her with the thought of getting married. "No, My friend," said she, "but the flesh has."

**WE | 1:5 | AUGUST 1, 1872:** "Some enlightened women hold that the Father designed for man to eat of the forbidden fruit; but seeing the consequences, he had not fortitude to meet the requisition, so his wife had to do it for him."

**WE | 2:17 | FEBRUARY 1, 1874:** "Advertising for a wife is just as absurd as it would be to get measured for an umbrella."

**WE | 1:17 | JANUARY 31, 1873:** A gentleman who had left his wife alone in the theatre while he went out to get a whiff of fresh air "apologized" on his return. "Dear me," said she, "I thought you went to give me a chance to flirt with that man with the mustache." She has had no cause to complain of any want of attention from her husband since.

**WE | 1:19 | MARCH 1, 1873:** A young lady who was rebuked by her mother for kissing her intended, justified the act by quoting the passage: Whatsoever you would that men would do unto you, do you even so unto them.

**WE | 2:9 | OCTOBER 1, 1873:** Why do women talk less in February than in any other month? Because it is the shortest month of the year."

**WE | 1:2 | JUNE 15, 1872:** "Can you tell me how the devil is?" asked an irreverent fellow of a clergy man. "My friend, you must keep your own family record," was the answer.

**WE | 1:2 | JUNE 15, 1872:** An eccentric Connecticut gentleman, recently deceased, left to religious institutions \$75,000, to his cook, \$120,000, and to each of his five children, \$400. This man's affections lay principally in his stomach.

**WE | 1:2 | JUNE 15, 1872:** Progressive teacher to a pupil of the period: "Sary Jane Hooker, just take that chewing gum right out

of your mouth. Little girls who chew gum in school need never expect to become President of the United States." Ambitious young ladies, with Presidential aspirations, will please take due notice and reduce the gum traffic proportionately.

**WE | 1:1 | JUNE 1, 1872:** An old lady says she hears every day of civil engineers, and wonders if there is no one to say a civil word for conductors.

**WE | 1:1 | JUNE 1, 1872:** Old lady to her niece—"Good gracious, Matilda, but it's cold. My teeth are actually chattering." Loving niece—"Well, don't let them chatter too much, or they may tell where you bought them."

**WE | 3:19 | MARCH 1, 1875:** Everyone has a curiosity to know how celebrated people look; and so we will describe a few women prominent as writers or lecturers.

Mrs. Stanton is a handsome woman. Miss Anthony and Mrs. Livermore are both plain. Marie and Jane Porter were women of high brows and irregular features, as was also Miss Sedgwick. Anna Dickenson has a strong, masculine face; Kate Field has a good-looking, though by no means a pretty one, and Mrs. Stowe is positively homely. Alice and Phoebe Cary were both plain in features, though their sweetness of disposition added greatly to their personal appearance. Margaret Fuller had a splendid head but her features were irregular, and she was anything but handsome, though sometimes in a glow of conversation she appeared almost radiant. Charlotte Bronte had wonderously beautiful dark brown eyes and a perfectly shaped head. She was small to diminutiveness, and was as simple in her manners as a child. Julia Ward Howe is a fine-looking woman, wearing an aspect of grace and refinement, with great force of character in her face and carriage. Laura Holloway resembles Charlotte Bronte, both in personal appearance and in the sad of experience of her young life. Neither Mary Booth nor Marian Harlan can lay claim to handsome faces, though they are splendid specimens of cultured women, while Mary Clemmer Ames is just as pleasing in features as her writings are graceful and popular.

## EXPONENT II | *Patti Perfect*

By Margaret B. Black & Midge W. Nielsen | Orem, Utah  
Exponent II Vol. 10: No. 2 (Winter 1984)

*Many LDS women unconsciously compete with an idealized image of the already-perfect wife and mother who successfully incorporates all the demands of family, church, and society into her life. Although we have never met such a woman, we persist in believing she's out there somewhere. We can just imagine what she must accomplish in a day ...*

Patti gets up very early and says her personal prayers. She zips up her slim, vigorous body into her warm-up suit and tiptoes outside to run her usual five miles (on Saturday she does 10). Returning home all aglow, she showers and dresses for the day in a tailored skirt and freshly starched and ironed blouse. She settles down for quiet meditation and scripture reading before preparing the family breakfast. The morning's menu calls for whole wheat pancakes, homemade syrup, freshly squeezed orange juice, and powdered milk (the whole family loves it).

With classical music wafting through the air, Patti awakens her husband and 10 children. She spends a quiet moment with each and helps them plan a happy day. The children quickly dress in clothes that were laid out the night before. They cheerfully make their beds, clean their rooms, and do the individual chores assigned to them on the Family Work Wheel Chart. They assemble for breakfast the minute mother calls.

After family prayer and scripture study, the children all practice their different musical instruments. Father leaves for work on a happy note. All too soon it is time for the children to leave for school. Having brushed (and flossed) their teeth, the children pick up coats, books bags, and lunches that were prepared the night before and arrive at school five minutes early.

With things more quiet, Patti has story-time with her pre-schoolers and teaches them cognitive reading skills. She feeds, bathes, and rocks the baby before putting him down for his morning nap. With the baby sleeping peacefully and the three-year-old twins absorbed in creative play, Patti tackles the laundry and the housework. In less than an hour, everything is in order. Thanks to wise scheduling and children who are trained to work, her house never really gets dirty.



Proceeding to the kitchen, Patti sets out tonight's dinner: frozen veal parmigiana that she made in quantity from her home-grown tomatoes and peppers. She then mixes and kneads 12 loaves of bread. While the bread rises, Patti dips a batch of candles to supplement her food storage. As the bread bakes, she writes in her personal journal and dashes off a few quick letters: one to her Congressman and a couple genealogy inquiries to distant cousins. Patti then prepares her mini-class lesson on organic gardening. She also inserts two pictures and a certificate in little Paul's scrapbook, noting with satisfaction that all family albums are up-to-date. Checking the mail, Patti sees that their income tax refund has arrived—a result of having filed in January. It is earmarked for mission and college savings accounts. Although Patti's hardworking husband earns only a modest salary, her careful budgeting has kept the family debt-free.

**“ In less than an hour, everything is in order.**

**Thanks to wise scheduling and children who are trained to work, her house never really gets dirty.”**

After lunch, Patti drops the children off at Grandma's for their weekly visit. Grandma enjoys babysitting and appreciates the warm loaf of bread. Making an extra call, Patti takes a second loaf to one of the sisters she is assigned to visit teach. A third loaf goes to the non-member neighbor on the corner.

Patti arrives at the elementary school where she directs a special education program. A clinical psychologist, Patti finds directing this program an excellent way to stay abreast of her field while raising her family. Before picking up her little ones, Patti finishes collecting for the charity fund drive.

Home again, Patti settles the children down for their afternoon naps. She spends some quiet time catching up on her reading and filing.

As she mists her luxuriant house plants, the school children come through the door. Patti listens attentively to each one as they tell about their day. The children start right in on their homework, with mother supervising and encouraging them. When all the schoolwork is done, Patti and the children enjoy working on one of their family projects. Today they work on the quilt stretched on frames in a corner of the family room.

Dinnertime and father arrives, and it is a special hour for the whole family. They enjoy Patti's well-balanced, tasty meal, along with stimulating conversation. After dinner, Father and Mom can relax. She enjoys listening to the sounds of laughter and affection that come from the kitchen.

With the teenaged children in charge at home, Mother and Father attend an evening session at the temple. During the return trip, they sit close together as in courting days. "Well, dear," says Paul Perfect, "did you have a good day?" Patti reflectively answers, "Yes, I really did. But I feel I need more challenge in my life. I think I'll contact our Family Organization and volunteer to head up a reunion for August."

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## EXPONENT BLOG | *My Life as a Centerfold*

Posted on July 17, 2007 | By Deborah

"I picked up the dry cleaning . . . oh, and I finally got the proofs from my nude photo session."

"Your what?" asked my husband.

"My nude photo session — I told you about it."

Long pause. "Remind me."



I have a way of alarming my dermatologists. They are alarmed by the number of moles sprinkled across my body, alarmed by their peculiar edge pattern, alarmed by the inevitable lab results of every biopsy: extreme severe dysplastic nevus. (Yeah, that means pre-cancerous.)

In December, during my quarterly visit, Madame Dermatologist shaved off a changing mole and, as a bit of an experiment, a tiny textbook-normal mole in the same region. Both came back severe — make that "extreme severe." She was alarmed and passed me off to the experts at Memorial Sloane-Kettering Cancer Center for more careful monitoring.

Now, I love my new doctor. I love his receptionist, who recognizes my voice on the phone. I love the waiting room that is flooded with the light of floor-to-ceiling windows. When you don't really have cancer, Sloane-Kettering is a great place to spend an afternoon.

Of course, someday I will almost certainly really have melanoma — or "the noma," as we call it around here. As my Cool New Doctor explained, I grow my moles atypically. Hazards of having luscious red locks, I guess. Instead of removing every suspicious mole and leaving me with scarred limbs, he suggested Full Body Digital Photography — a high-resolution way of tracking each and every mole on a monthly basis.

Essentially, he was prescribing a nude photo session. This was not the phrase in my head when I walked in for my appointment with the medical photographer. If it had been, I probably would have shaved my legs.

I entered feeling that anxiety that had been lacing my limbs for weeks, that had me staring at my once-benign brown spots with increasing suspicion. For years, I'd viewed my red hair as a particular gift — (just ask me to rattle off names of luminaries with auburn tresses) — but suddenly I found myself hoping my (future) children inherited my husband's mocha coloring.

I had the last appointment of the day. The spring sun was dipping down, casting shades of red into the deserted waiting room. The floor was empty, save the Super Receptionist and the medical photographer, a woman about my age. When we entered the studio, I made a decision. No, that sounds too deliberate. Inexplicably, I suddenly wanted to have some fun with my body. I didn't want it to be my enemy.

"Hey, this may be my one opportunity for a nude photo shoot," I told Ms. Photographer. "Care if I ham it up?"

She laughed, "Fabulous. Be my guest."

So as we proceeded with her careful script of camera angles, I threw in some sultry smiles, an arched eyebrow or two. We laughed and chatted about our careers. It felt good to be in my skin.



Today, as I looked through the oversize book of prints, I warned my mind, "You just keep quiet about the extra pudge, the stomach roll, and the scar tissue."

And when my husband came home, I wouldn't let him eat dinner until he turned every page.

He said I looked beautiful. He's right. ✨





Illustration by Pat Langmade, Paradise Valley, Arizona

## FLANNEL BOARD

# TO PEC OR NOT TO PEC?

## *Some Feminine Counsel on Councils*

*In my calling that encompasses helping people through the full menu of life's miseries, PEC is the worst part of the job. | By Dana Haight Cattani • Bloomington, Indiana*

*The ward priesthood executive committee (PEC) includes the bishopric, ward clerk, ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, elders quorum president, ward mission leader and Young Men president.*

*The PEC meets regularly to consider priesthood matters....As needed, the bishop may invite the Relief Society president to attend some ward PEC meetings to discuss confidential welfare matters and to coordinate home teaching and visiting teaching assignments. | Handbook 2: Administering the Church 2010, section 4.3*

As Relief Society president, I typically attend three monthly meetings. The first is a one-on-one appointment with the bishop. I generally bring a focused agenda, and we make decisions and discuss concerns candidly. I leave with a sense of autonomy, support, and partnership.

The second is the Ward Council meeting with the bishop, his two counselors, the executive secretary, ward clerk, high priests group leader, elders quorum president, ward mission leader, two full-time missionaries, Young Men president, Sunday School president, and high council representative. If everyone attends,

there are 13 men present, as well as three women: the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidents. The bishopric brings the agenda, and the discussions are mostly focused. Generally, I leave with a sense of the differences among the organizations' leaders and priorities and of the challenges in working together.

The third meeting is PEC. It includes all 13 men from the Ward Council, and, at the bishop's standing invitation, me. The bishopric provides the agenda. Consistently, I leave feeling frustrated. In my calling, which encompasses helping people through the full menu of life's miseries, PEC is the worst part of the job.

The PEC meetings I attend are not disorganized or poorly run or irrelevant. The men are gracious and competent, and for the most part, I enjoy working with them. My ward, like most others in the Church, has more active women than men on the rolls. The "priesthood matters" that make up the agendas at these meetings virtually always affect women, either directly or indirectly. Yet the committee officially consists entirely of men. This structure leads to some puzzling administrative arrangements.

For example, seemingly analogous roles turn out to be not at all parallel. The Young Men president is a permanent PEC member, but the Young Women president is not even on the potential guest list. Similarly, the apparent ranking of stewardships is a bit odd.

The Young Men president has a very demanding calling but a relatively narrow stewardship. He serves males ages 12-18—in my ward, about eight young men. In contrast, the Primary president serves children of both genders ages 18 months through 11 years—in my ward, about 80 children. She oversees 10 times as many people as the Young Men president, including the largest staff in the ward, and her organization touches upon a much higher percent of the ward households. However, like the Young Women president, the Primary president is never part of this executive committee. In the same way, an elders quorum president and high priests group leader divide home teaching and quorum responsibilities for the adult households, while a Relief Society president serves any household that includes a woman over age 18—in my ward, virtually every one. Short of the bishop, the Relief Society president's stewardship is the broadest in the ward. Yet, she is not a permanent member of the executive committee.

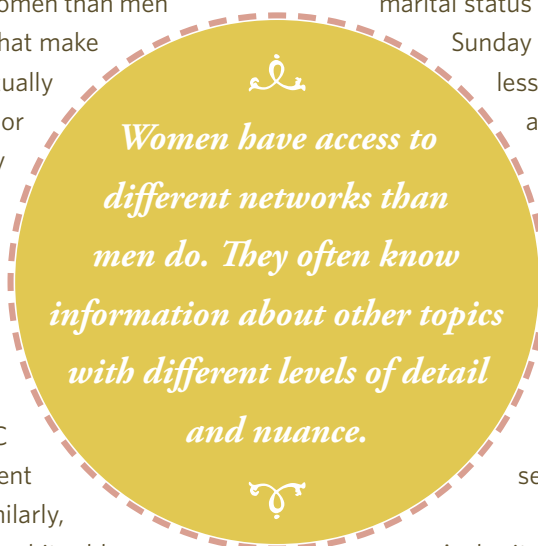
I once listened to a discussion in PEC about a calling that needed to be filled. One of the men suggested a particular woman, and several others chimed in their support. After listening for a few minutes, I pointed out that this woman was expecting a baby in six weeks. (Had they not noticed?) Immediately, the conversation shifted to another individual. My input was salient and pivotal.

Women have access to different networks than men do. They often know information about other topics with different levels of detail and nuance. They know, among other things, that nursing lounge chairs should have arms, that undersized ovens in a church kitchen are inadequate for ward dinners, and that thermostats set by men in suit coats inevitably will be uncomfortable for women wearing short-sleeve blouses. They know, as well, that families in need rarely want to be discussed at a council meeting, that women visitors need not be asked their marital status or how many children they have, that fifth

Sunday combined Priesthood and Relief Society lessons are opportunities for discussion and application of gospel principles rather than simply more doctrine, and that some ward community service activities need to be organized by and for women so that they have explicit opportunities to make a difference in public life. Why write the important perspectives of women out of an executive committee tasked with addressing welfare, missionary, and service roles for the entire ward?

A charitable explanation might be that the women are not excluded; they are protected. Sunday mornings can be very busy if a woman has young children to feed and dress. In households with married couples, at least one adult needs to be home to facilitate, and surely some men find it easier to preside from a distance when it comes to hog-tying toddlers or rousing semi-comatose teenagers. Given a choice, some women undoubtedly would prefer to skip additional Sunday meetings that can be tedious and time-consuming. In our church, at least, administration is the province of men, while combing unruly hair, washing the breakfast dishes, and prepping the dinner is typically the province of women. Taking a woman out of her home on Sunday morning (or afternoon or evening) presumably would interfere with her divinely designed role as nurturer—whether or not she has children at home or at all.

Less charitable explanations for excluding women include



rigid culture and gender roles. Men hold the priesthood. The priesthood is central to the Gospel. Any organization with women in it is, by definition, auxiliary. (In dark moments, I think that in our church, men preside, lead, administer, ordain, call, baptize, confirm, and bless while women provide food, sex, and child care. If the women were to strike, we might quickly find out what is auxiliary and what is not.)

Of course, the most obvious rationale for the existing PEC structure is *Handbook 2, Administering the Church 2010*. The composition of the committee is clearly specified. No girls allowed, except by special invitation.



More than 25 years ago, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich published an essay in *Exponent II* titled “On Appendages.” She noted that our imprecise use of language creates some problems and distortions. Specifically, we tend to substitute the words *priesthood* and *men* rather freely. (Not convinced? Listen carefully when the conducting member of the bishopric stands up after the sacrament. Whom does he thank for the reverent administration of the bread and water? If he thanks the young *men* rather than the *priesthood*, give him a high five after the closing prayer.) Ulrich’s assessment remains true today:

*Part of the problem is our vocabulary. Because we use the word priesthood to refer to both the vehicle and the power, we get into some curious situations, almost like mistaking a utility pole for electricity or a sacrament cup for water.*

What if every ward had a Men’s Executive Committee that had the ear of the bishop for an hour each month? Would women be significantly more marginalized than they are in the current arrangement? Names matter. So does the composition of influential committees. Additional meetings can be burdensome, but I suspect that most women would be happy to serve if they had meaningful roles and felt empowered to make and implement their own decisions. They would be happier still to serve in a setting where they were not permanently outnumbered and uniformly outranked. This dynamic forces women who advocate for change into unflattering caricature roles: shrew, battle-axe, disgruntled daughter of God.

I could easily opt out of PEC. All I would have to do is plead domestic responsibilities. It is an iron-clad excuse for a

woman—and the reason I do not invoke it. Here is the dilemma: Not to attend PEC is to accept the status quo—that men make the decisions on behalf of women—but to attend PEC is to accept the role of token woman as sufficient. Either I absent myself from an instrumental committee and leave it entirely in the hands of men, or I lend credibility to a body I do not think is entirely legitimate.

I cannot, on my own, revise *Handbook 2* to include the ordaining of women, the renaming of the PEC as the Ward Executive Committee, and the reconstituting of its membership to include fewer men and multiple members of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidencies. I can, however, offer the PEC in my ward one example of a woman who shows up and speaks out. I do not get out of bed at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning to sit in those meetings like Clarence Thomas, who in 20 years on the Supreme Court has never spoken from the bench. If silence

is the intent, let’s all sleep in and read a memo at a more reasonable hour. I speak up, and I speak disproportionately, in an effort to represent my large and diverse constituency proportionately.

So I attend PEC every month. I go to stake my claim that we are the Relief Society, not the Catering Society, and that the scout leaders do not need us to bake 200 brownies for their training meeting. I go to witness the discussion on families that have not had home teaching visits in the past six months. Visiting teaching? Not mentioned—until I bring it up. (I keep all those statistics on visits that apparently do not count for much.) I go

to notice when we spend a quarter of one meeting discussing whether or not 12-year-old boys should help take the sacrament to shut-ins or be allowed to be home teaching companions with their fathers. Did we discuss the importance of giving 12-year-old girls visible and important responsibilities in the ward? It never came up—except in my next meeting with the bishop.

I go so that when we sing the opening hymn, one voice is in the treble clef.

Am I co-opted in my role as token woman? Probably. Do I irritate the men? Undoubtedly, and with good reason. Do we need more women in the councils of the church?

Of course. ❄



# FRUIT WARS

## *Navigating One Marriage's Banana Battles*

*"While extremely frugal in most ways ('I prefer the term "cheap," my dad says), he has an obsession with buying fruit."*

*By Margaret Olsen Hemming • Baltimore, Maryland*



When I was nine years old, my father went to a conference in Boston with several pounds of bananas packed in his suitcase. My mother had insisted that he take them.

She had spent a day humming to herself as she anticipated his upcoming trip, happy to have a week to rid the house of fruit during his absence. When he came home just a few hours before leaving for the airport burdened with bags of bananas and apples, she panicked. The fruit was soon banished to his suitcase. When Dad returned from his trip, he insisted that those bananas were highly useful, even needed during his trip. Mom grimly smiled in response and said nothing. This was just another battle in what my siblings and I eventually came to refer to as the Fruit Wars.

While extremely frugal in most ways ("I prefer the term 'cheap,'" my dad says), he has an obsession with buying fruit. Since he always did the grocery shopping for the family, he had full rein to bring home boxes of pears, oranges, plums, and apples. Bananas are a particular weakness for him. The mammoth portions of fruit brought into the house meant that during my childhood, fruit was everywhere: in several bowls covering the counter, filling bins in the refrigerator, and stuffed in a box on the kitchen floor. My father argued that if five children and a passel of kids from an in-home daycare center were to get three full servings of fruit a day, we required a daily input of at least 20 to 30 pieces of fruit. In theory, his numbers added up. I have no doubt that our full house went through an enormous amount of food every day. But in reality, the fruit would begin to rot, and then my mom had to deal with it.

First the fruit went into the refrigerator; the kids were

admonished to eat the fruit in the fridge before we went for the new fruit on the counter. When even the refrigerator fruit began to rot, Mom would make grape yogurt, apple pies, and banana bread. Banana bread was a staple of my childhood. But as soon as the bananas were used, my father quickly replaced them. We couldn't eat the banana bread fast enough. One unusually hot summer, when Mom was nine months pregnant with my younger brother, our freezer was stocked with five loaves of banana bread and there were still several pounds of bananas on the counter. My mother declared herself to be enabling an

addiction and swore off ever making banana bread again. We all thought she was joking, but more than 20 years later, she has stuck by her promise. My younger siblings have rarely ever eaten banana bread, which makes it feel like we grew up in different families. But the end of banana bread didn't stop bananas from coming into the house in massive quantities. The banana bread strike has created a few awkward moments, especially with ever-self-reliant women from the ward. They would come over for book group and my mom would apologize for the piles of fruit on the kitchen counter. "Oh!" they would say, "You should make banana bread!" Awkward silence. How

does one explain a ban on banana bread as a response to an over-zealous husband addicted to buying fruit?

My dad always did the grocery shopping on his way home from work, arriving at the door with bags of groceries that the kids had to help unload. Many times my mom would peer into a few bags and her face would fall. "Bill, where are we going to put all this fruit? Look. Look in the refrigerator. Look at the counters. There is no space for it. What am I going to do with all this?" Sometimes my dad's reaction was defensive, sometimes jovial, but always the same, "Oh the kids will eat it!"

*"Where did this  
grapefruit come from?  
Bill, is there grapefruit  
in the house?" The  
deception quickly  
unraveled. Another  
battle in the Fruit  
Wars commenced ..."*

And we did. Under great pressure. For years a fruit salad accompanied every single dinner in the house. My dad took over the chore of cutting up the fruit every evening and then adorned the table with an enormous bowl of fruit. "Has everyone had some fruit salad?" my dad would say, serving himself thirds and looking anxiously into the still-full bowl. "Margaret, have some fruit salad! You barely took any." The tone was always cheerful, but we all knew the tension that the bowl was creating. Unspoken words of accusation from my mom and defense from my dad made that salad the most emotionally burdened fruit in history. We took second helpings of fruit salad, just to avoid conflict. We also knew that it was useless to make any response to dad's question, "Have you had an orange today? Are you trying to get me into trouble?" It was easier to just take the orange.



Eventually my mom began sneaking fruit out of the house. She gave it to parents of her daycare kids or to families in the ward who needed meals. A few times it went straight into the trash, a waste that made both my parents feel terrible. Such an abundance of food gives the impression of wealth beyond discipline or understanding, but that wasn't the case at all. My parents had a very tight budget. My father spent every Saturday morning cutting coupons, doubling or tripling them up to get unbelievable grocery deals. We were well-cared for, but any extra expenses were carefully considered and often rejected. Fruit was the bizarre exception of a tightly run ship.

Like many Mormons their age, my parents were trying to achieve several conflicting goals at once: Have many children young, get good educations, stay out of debt, pay tithing, and have a parent at home. The pressure that this created heightened the transgression of rotten fruit: There was simply no room for waste in the family budget. But it also urged Dad on in his fruit-buying. He had five children to feed and limited funds to do it. Buying bulk fruit for incredible deals was an economic necessity, but it was also a joyful conquest. There was an exuberant thrill in keeping a family healthy in the cheapest way possible. The pleasure was strong enough that the habit remained long after the financial pressures had eased and the household had grown smaller.

By the time my older sister and I had started college, Dad had adopted some of Mom's methods of disposing of the fruit. When we would come home for Sunday dinner, we inevitably left with a bag of fresh contraband. If it came from Mom, it was always overt: "Please, take this bag of apples. We can't use it." If it came from Dad, it was less obvious and said in an undertone: "There are some oranges down in the food storage. Why don't

you take a few back to your apartment?"

At the same time, fruit coming into the house had gone undercover. My sister came home to visit one evening and Dad pulled her aside while Mom was out of the room. "I need you to get me a grapefruit," he said. "There's a box downstairs in the storage room, to the left of the door."

"Dad, did you hide a box of grapefruit from Mom?"

"Shhhhh....."

My sister retrieved the grapefruit and it went into the fruit salad that night. Halfway through dinner, Mom narrowed her eyes. "There's grapefruit in this salad."

Silence. Everyone chewed innocently.

"Where did this grapefruit come from? Bill, is there grapefruit in the house?" The deception quickly unraveled. Another battle in the Fruit Wars commenced as they rehashed all the old arguments for and against an unwieldy amount of Vitamin C in our home.

Over the years, Mom found ways of coming to peace with the fruit. She started a garden and began composting. College kids visiting home were always more grateful than adolescents for fresh fruit. In the process of becoming a social worker and therapist, she realized that she could let go and not allow her husband's problems to be her problems. When I visit now, there are always multiple full bowls on the counter and my toddler daughter is always encouraged to snack on several pieces of fruit ("Honey, can I cut up a plum for you? How about a banana?"). But really, the Fruit Wars are over. I wouldn't say that my parents ever reached an armistice, but their laughter about the issue today indicates that their marriage could overcome even the most painful banana battles. ❄️



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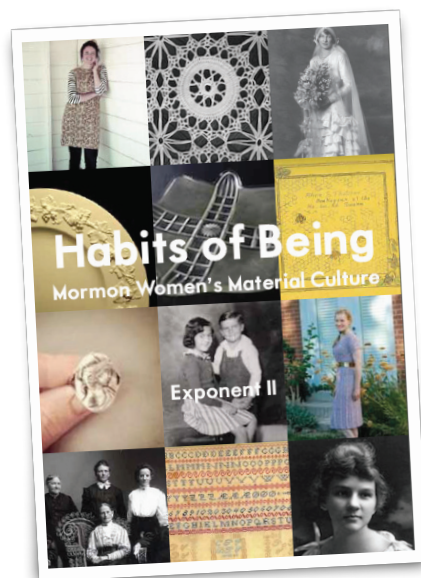
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